

ALAN MOORE'S

DODGEM! LOGIC

#7 Dec / Jan
Adults Only
£3.50



Shampoo for our real friends, real poo for our sham friends.

GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY

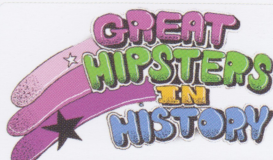
WORDS - ALAN MOORE / ARTWORK - CALLUZ



GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY!

No. 19 : Dick Gregory

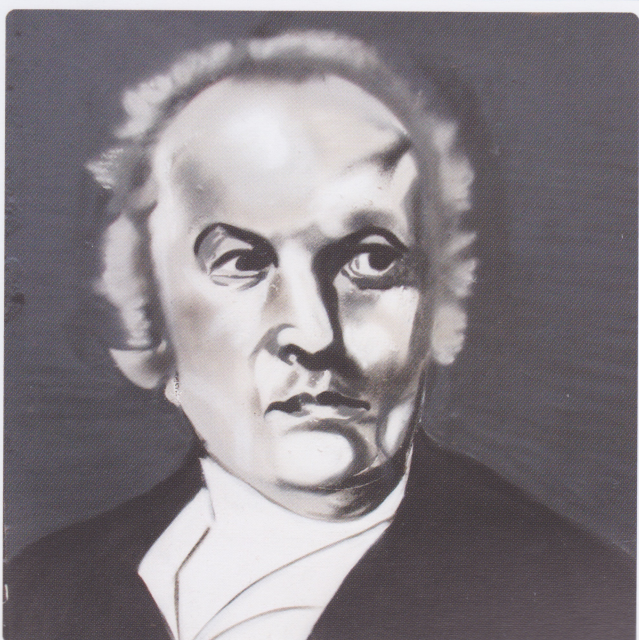
Born St. Louis, Missouri, 1932, track athlete Dick Gregory began his comedy career in 1956, part of a new wave of politicised black entertainers challenging racism in American society. He joined Civil Rights marches in the early 'sixties and went on to champion feminism, vegetarianism, and disclosure in a wide range of alleged conspiracies beginning with the Kennedy assassination. His autobiography, *nigger*, sold ten million copies and his Presidential bid in 1968 earned him a place on Richard Nixon's famous shit-list. Now 78, and on hunger-strike since this September over 9/11 cover-ups, Gregory has deservedly become a counter-culture legend.



GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY!

No. 20 : Mary Shelley

Born to proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and proto-anarchist William Godwin in 1797, her mother dying ten days later, Mary commenced her relationship with married poet Percy Shelley when aged seventeen. Fleeing to Europe, bearing and losing a baby daughter, the pair holidayed with Byron near Geneva during 1816, where Mary conceived of *Frankenstein*, the first science-fiction novel. Returning to England she married Shelley after the suicide of his wife, with Shelley himself drowned at sea in 1822. Continuing to write novels and essays until dying of a brain-tumour in 1851, Mary Shelley was a lifelong radical and an exemplary hipster.



GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY!

No. 21 : William Blake

Artist-poet William Blake, born Soho, 1757, saw visions from childhood and insisted on learning engraving and drawing over regular schooling. Influenced by his Moravian upbringing and mystics such as Böhme and Swedenborg, Blake foreshadowed the Romantic Movement. Marrying Catherine Boucher in 1782, he was a fierce radical, a colleague of both Wollstonecraft and Godwin who watched Newgate Prison burn and, in 1803, stood trial for sedition. Ignored or considered insane during his lifetime, he died in 1827 singing ecstatically and is today rightly perceived as England's greatest visionary poet and painter. Humanity doesn't get much better than William Blake.



Jack Frost roasting on an open fire, chestnuts nipping at your toes, tiny tots with their eyes all aglow...yeah, that's pretty much *Village of the Damned* as I remember it. You can't beat a traditional Christmas, can you, just like the ones we used to know? With a Conservative government in power and picturesque white drifts of hypothermic pensioners piled quaintly on the doorsteps and the hedgerows? With the screaming ghost of Noddy Holder haunting the last-minute gift shops even though he isn't dead? Rosy-cheeked students rioting traditionally against a return to that grand Dickensian tradition where only the rich can read, with police horses riding into crowds to issue a traditional trampling? The Real I.R.A. are threatening to step up their bombing campaign...bless, they always send...and meanwhile Russia's going back into Afghanistan to see if they can lend the Allied cause some of the magic they brought to the situation last time. The decade-defining vocals of John Lydon are back with us and subverting butter...from the inside. What year is this? Who's the President? There's Argentina making noises about going best-of-three over the Falklands, Mrs. Thatcher giving a disoriented wave from her front step like an upsetting robot Santa, a conglomerate of right-wing transatlantic dipshits who are keen to put another eco-trashing theocratic speed-bump in the White House, and of course a Royal Wedding to distract us from the general socio-economic Armageddon. Christmas would be great if it weren't for all the repeats. See, this is why you need an underground. Welcome to Dodgem Logic's Christmas/Eid/Diwali/Solstice/Hanukkah/God-Isn't-Even-Real-Day/Capitalist Feeding Frenzy/Saturnalia/Winterval spectacular!

And while you were asleep we've crept into your room and stuffed all sorts of wonderful surprises in your stockings, even though you took out that restraining order. We've put in a few Great Hipsters like a scattering of chocolate coins on top, while down there in the toe there's *Notes from Noho* like a slightly bitter tangerine. In the mysterious and lumpy stretch between those points we've crammed Dick Foreman's introduction to the genius of Michael Hurley, Kurt Amacker's powerful despatch from post-Katrina New Orleans, our favourite former filth Ol' Bill discoursing on his sordid Christmas Eve epiphany, and a small jar of Musson & Associates' finest organic Mustard. There's Dave Hamilton taking the long view from his Eco-Chamber, Dodgem Logic's cultural envoy Melinda Gebbie on slums, sunsets, sorcery and the advisability of smoking weed outside a Rio cop-shop, and the Alabama Three's Orlando Harrison unpicking the complicated knots of R.D. Laing. If you reach down a little further under that, there's Barney Farmer and Lee Healey on the latest hi-tech gift that all the kiddies will be asking for this year, Mr. and Mrs. Ince have thoughtfully provided us with a nice Robin who chirps his seasonal message on the philosophical redundancy of a divine creator, while Steve Aylett's masterful Mayor Nimble steps in to remind us of the real meaning of Christmas, possibly. And we're not even halfway down! Ah, the look on your little faces...

There's Illuzion stridently insisting that Wayne Rooney should give Tiny Tim his pay rise, Sav and David Quantick with their increasingly marvellous account of Louis Wain, and Orpington's own Josie Long, fresh from a horrifying, nearly-fatal tour and a hilarious, wildly successful car-wreck. Then we've got my Christmas ghost-story and Stewart Lee's timely reminder of that much-loved Xmas character, the Super Moby Dick of Space. Steve Holland warns us not to overlook the holiday's religious aspects with his summary of Plymouth plumber's son turned Tibetan mystic Lobsang Rampa, Norway's nifty Kristian Hammerstad makes his enchanting Dodgem Logic debut, Margaret Killjoy venerates the gods of trash and Tamsyn Payne's on hand to pimp your Barbie. There's Claire Ashby helping you to grow your Christmas dinner, Wendi Jarrett helping you to cook it and our Spinning Doctors standing by just in case anything goes wrong. It comes in simply gorgeous and entirely inappropriate Kev O'Neill wrapping paper, and you're certain to have broken it by Boxing Day.

On a more serious note, none of our readers should forget that very special baby who was born upon a winter's night all those long years ago and went on to transform the world with his vision of love, and also his radical re-imagining of superheroes. But then that was in November, on the 18th, and I didn't get a single card from any of you. Next year, there'll be no excuses. Happy Christmas.

Alan Moore ~ Light of the World & Talk of the Town

WHO'S WHO IN THE DODGEM LOGIC GROTTO

Alan Moore ~ He's not real. It's just your dad dressed up. **Tony 'Knockabout' Bennett** ~ Co-publisher and Grinch.
Queen Calluz ~ Editor and fairy on top of the tree. **The Artist Formerly Known as Downtown Joe Brown** ~ Assistant Editor and glittering bauble.
Gavin and Alix Wallace ~ Design-reindeer in jingling harnesses. **Claire Ashby** ~ She's walking in the air.

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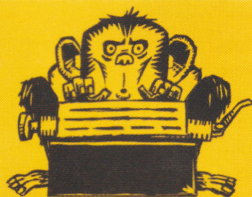
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CHRISTMAS EDITION



Deadlock in midwinter festival negotiations

Santa and Baby Jesus vie for exclusive ownership of December 25th



Emily Veganburger
Bethlehem

As we enter day twelve of the midwinter festival negotiations, tensions remain high. The world can only watch and hope that the rival superpowers come to some agreement over the contested date, thus avoiding any hostilities.

The two organisations' ongoing struggle, popularly known as 'the Cold War', has so far been limited to espionage, propaganda and rivalry at sports events. But Baby Jesus and Santa Claus have both been losing influence over the holiday, due, respectively, to the rise of atheism and the recession.

Just what either side intends to do about this is unknown, but international concerns have grown following a build up of Elf forces at the North Pole and "suspicious clanking noises" coming from Baby Jesus' manger.

Although both sides denied planning any action, peace talks were hastily arranged by governing body Myth Management.

Claus' huge team of lawyers, funded by a leading soft drinks company, opened by claiming that Dec 25th is not even Jesus'

'Don't make me pull rank here, Saint Nicholas.'

real birthday, and demanding to see a birth certificate.

Baby Jesus' team countered that they'd been using the date for 16 centuries, whilst their opponents had simply "appropriated a bunch of modern German rubbish in order to sell some toys."

"Perhaps the Pagans would have something to say about appropriating holidays," responded Claus, to which Baby Jesus, eyeing him levelly, replied "Don't make me pull rank here, Saint Nicholas".

Diplomats are now attempting to keep talks going until Boxing Day, in the hope that everyone will be too stuffed with turkey to start any trouble. ■

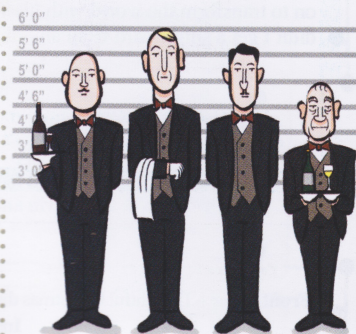
MSG in a bottle
What's lurking in
your cupboard?

Food



Murder at butler convention
Detectives baffled

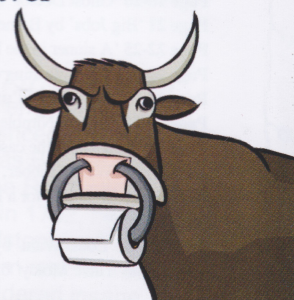
Crime



WC fields

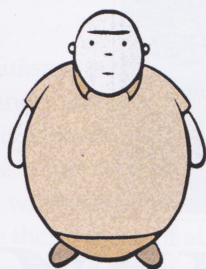
The perils of using
festival toilets

Travel



HOW THINGS WORK #43: XENOPHOBIA/RACISM

1) Most people are mostly arseholes.

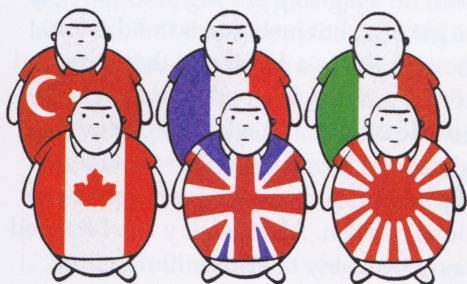


common or garden arsehole
(anus vulgaris)

2) The country or culture that an arsehole grows up in provides a particular flavour.



3) This gives us different flavours of arsehole.



4) When we meet an arsehole who's from the same country or race as us,

I enjoy football, soaps, petty bureaucracy and complaining about the weather.



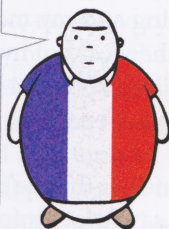
we think:

What an arsehole.



5) But when we meet an arsehole who's from a different race or country,

I am rude, enjoy pretentious cuisine, have better sex than you and enjoy testing nuclear weapons.



we think:

Bloody French people.



We assume it is the flavour (e.g. Frenchness) that makes them an arsehole. But actually they're just an arsehole with a French flavour.

6) And that's how racism/xenophobia happens.

This is known as the 'flavour of arseholes' theory.

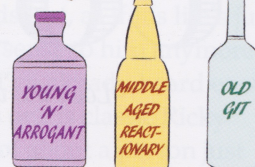
Do not Google this.

NOTE A: BIGOTRY IN GENERAL

The same thing works for Gender:



Age:



Class:



...etc. Of course, most arseholes are their own unique cocktail of racial, gender, age and class flavours.

NOTE B: THE FLIP SIDE

The flavouring affects everyone: groovy people as well as arseholes.

Could anyone other than the French have made a film quite like Amélie, or the British Withnail and I?

The flavour isn't inherently good or bad, it's just added to good or bad stuff.

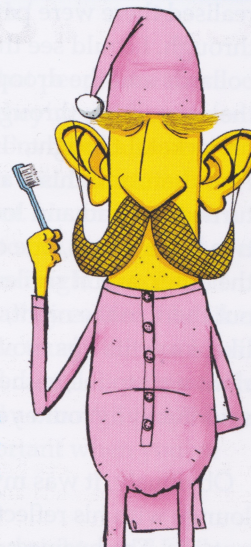
CAMERON DIAZ KURT RUSSELL BEN STILLER

there's something about mary



“ My morning regimen: brush teeth, wax moustache, stiffen upper lip. ”

Continuing our exclusive excerpts from Derring Dos & Don'ts, the memoirs of Col D John Coleman
Weekend magazine



log us into your interpod:



myface

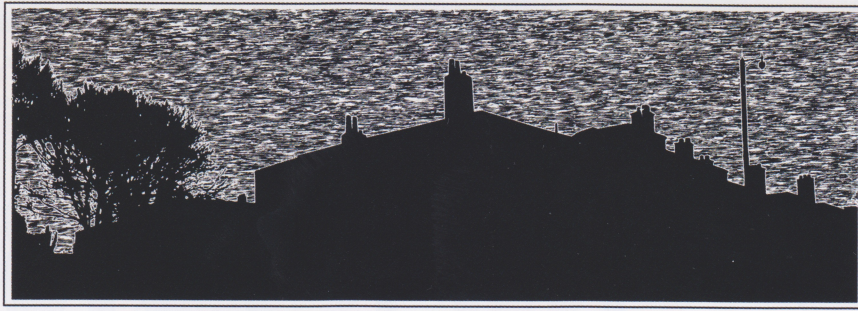


spacebook



fritter





COLD READING

Lock the windows, draw the curtains and let Alan Moore spin you a winter's tale.

In the old black-and-white plate, the pool of shadow on the left of the ghost's face uncurled its legs to scuttle for the margin and the cluttered desk beyond. I shrank back in my seat and, no word of a lie, I genuinely felt it. It was over in a second when I realised it was just a garden spider come indoors out of the cold, what had been camouflaged against the dark bits of the photo, but I really felt that sort of tingle up the spine that all my clients go on about, so I know what they're saying. I can empathise with them. It's not all acting.

Actually, to be perfectly honest, I think nine times out of ten it's that gives us what I suppose you'd call a supernatural feeling: something turning out to not be what you thought it was. I can remember, I was only six or seven when I saw my first and only ghost. I was with Mum and Dad in the lounge of a seaside pub at night, standing there glued to the glass doors and gawping out into the dark, not thinking of anything in particular. Just then I saw this man walking across the car park of the pub away from me. He wasn't any colour. He was all washed out and grey, and then I realised there were parts of him that I could see through. I could see the scrubby strips of grass, the bollards and the drooping lengths of chain that closed the car park in, through the black folds and shadows of his jacket. I thought, 'It's a ghost! I'm really seeing one!' And then, and this was the most frightening bit, it turned its head and looked straight at me. It had got two blurry faces, one of them just slightly offset from the other, and it smiled in at me through the glass from out there in the night, and then it spoke my name. It's like, I saw its lips move but I heard its voice as if it was right next to me, rather than outside in the car park. It said 'Ricky? Would you like a Fanta?'

Obviously, it was my dad, standing behind me in the lounge with his reflection superimposed on the dark outside. The business with two faces turned out to be

caused by double glazing, but just for a second there, you know? I'd thought it was a ghost and that it proved all of the stories that I'd heard from other kids at school. I think it made me cry and when I explained why, about the ghost and everything, Dad told me off and said I was like an old woman, getting taken in by all that superstitious rubbish. Always very level-headed was my father, and I probably take after him in that respect, although I never really liked him much. I was much closer to my mum, but then that's very often how it is with boys, especially an only child. When Dad passed on I suppose Mum was my first audience, as well as being my most willing and my most appreciative. She thought the world of me, my mum. She gave a little gasp and filled up when I did his voice and said, 'I always loved you, Irene.'

Knowing Dad, it was a safe bet that he'd never told her that in life, and when I saw the comfort that I'd brought that woman, my own mum, that's when I knew I had a gift. That's when I knew what Ricky Sullivan had been put on this earth for. Oh, there'll always be the unbelievers and debunkers in the papers, on the telly or what have you and it does, it makes me angry when they say people like me are cold, unfeeling, just taking advantage and all that. I'm sorry, but if they could see the happiness in people's faces, if they really thought about the service me and others like me are providing, giving people strength to get on with their lives when they've just lost a loved one, well, they couldn't say the things they say. I'm sorry, they just couldn't. I don't have to justify myself.

I mean, do I believe all of the things that I tell people? In my heart, I can't say that I do. But then, what about priests? You can't tell me that all of them believe every last word of what they preach, but do they get called 'ghouls in cardigans' or 'Vincent Price, but camp'? No. No, they don't. That's because people recognise all of

the reassurance and the comfort that religion brings to people, and it doesn't really matter if it's true or not. Or doctors, it's like doctors when they say that a placebo, that's like, what, a sugar pill? That a placebo can work wonders without any side effects, but that they can't prescribe them 'cause of all the medical red tape and ethics, health and safety, all that business. That's me. I'm a spiritual sugar pill, but I do people good. I'm sorry, but I touch their lives.

And yes, I suppose you could say that I've done very well out of it, got the mortgage on this house paid off last year, but that's not what I do it for. It's not the money. How can I explain? It's more the gratitude, the look on some poor widow's face and knowing that you've helped them. That, to me, what can I say? That look's worth more than gold. That's my reward, right there.

Although this place is very nice, it must be said, with the old-fashioned furniture and all the books, the angel figurines along the mantelpiece, all that. It's mostly for the clients' benefit, same as the New Age music I've got on. It reassures them, makes them feel as if they're in safe hands. No, no, it's very comfortable. It's very cosy, and especially now that the clocks have gone back and we've got these cold nights. If I peer out of the window at the park across the road it looks like one of them old-fashioned fogs tonight, where you can hardly even see the trees. It just makes me feel all the warmer, with the central heating turned up, standing here in this new cardigan that one of my old ladies knitted for me. Said I hadn't charged enough for all the happiness I'd brought her, bless her, and she knew that I liked cardigans. A lovely lady. No, when I was little, what I liked best were the rainy, windy nights when I could lay tucked up in bed and think about all of the people out there in the cold, so that I could feel even snuggler by comparison. I'm lucky in that that's what my whole life's like these days, very snug. Snug by comparison, you might say. Ah. There goes the phone. The landline, not my mobile, although even I have trouble telling them apart because the ring tone's very similar.

'Hello, there. You've reached Ricky Sullivan - the angel's answering service. This is Ricky speaking. So, how can I help you?'

'Um, hello. My name's Dave, David Berridge. Look, I've...well, I've lost somebody, y'know, recently, and I was just...I don't know. To be honest, I've been in two

minds about if I should ring you up or not. I've never really been much of a one for all this, no offence, and I don't even know if they'd approve, the person that I've lost...'

Just judging from the accent he's a local man, probably lower middle-class and in his, what, his forties? Early fifties? He sounds lost, as if his life's just fell to bits and nothing makes sense to him anymore. He's calling out for help, and I've already heard enough to know that as clients go, this one is classic Ricky Sullivan. You can tell quite a lot about a person just from speaking to them on the phone. I'm writing down his full name on my jotter even as I'm talking to him.

'Mr. Berridge, let me stop you right there. I prefer it if vessels of light...that's what I call my clients...if vessels of light don't tell me anything about themselves before they come in for a consultation, if that's what you should decide to do. That way I get a clearer reading of their aura, without any preconceptions, and it's fairer on them. What I always say is, if a person has a genuine psychic gift, why should you tell them everything? They should be telling you! That way, you can judge for yourself if I'm the real thing or not. That's only fair. We do get a few con men in this business, and that's why I insist that the special people who've been brave enough to seek my help are treated properly and given credit as intelligent adults. I'm sorry, but that's just the way I am. Now, if you should decide to come in for a consultation that'll be just 50 pounds, or it's 100 for a house call. No need to bring any money with you, you can pay me when you get the invoice in a week or two, and only if you think that what I've done in contacting your loved one's worth that much.'

I used to ask less, but I found that people are more likely to believe in something if they've paid more for it. Mr. Berridge, he sounds half convinced already, though his manner's very shaken and uncertain. I expect that he's been through a lot. He ums and ahs a bit and then asks if he can come to the house and have a consultation, perhaps later, around eight or so? I tell him that's fine, and that he can call by earlier if he likes, I shall be in all evening. It's a little touch, but it makes everything feel more relaxed and casual. It puts people at their ease and makes them feel as though they're in control of things, and that's important when you've had a loss.

He thanks me and hangs up, and right away I fish out

the old iPhone and look up the local paper's website, scrolling through the last two weeks' obituaries before I find the name that I've got scribbled on my notepad. 'Berridge, Dennis, beloved brother of David, uncle of Darrell and Josephine, passed away quietly at home, November blah blah blah', and after that there was one of those poems that they must get from a book, like Best Man's speeches. I'm not criticising. People are entitled to their feelings, obviously, but I just feel it's tacky and it's inappropriate, I'm sorry but I do, especially when it's about something as personal as someone's death.

So, anyway, a brother, then. I check and see if Mr. Berridge is on Facebook, and it turns out I'm in luck. Just reading through the updates and then following up links to a few other sites, I've pretty soon got all the information that I need to make a good impression on the client when he turns up. From what I'm reading here they weren't just brothers, they were twins. It's hardly any wonder David Berridge sounded so shook up. They say they often share a psychic link, do twins, and when one of them dies it must be terrible. I can remember Ronnie Kray, the gangster, when he died and it said in the paper that his brother Reg had sent a wreath he'd made out 'to the other half of me'. It must be dreadful, losing somebody so close. You'd be so vulnerable. Still, on the bright side, it makes all my prep work easier, only having the one birth-date to remember and with a good many details of their upbringing in common. And it says here they're identical, so David's Facebook photo will do me for Dennis, too: a very bland face with fine, mousey hair that's going grey and starting to recede; a light dusting of freckles on the nose; lacklustre eyes and a slight overbite that makes his mouth look rabbit. He doesn't look as if he's got much to him, to be frank about it, although I suppose it might be a poor choice of photograph. That's why I always make sure Jenny, she's my press girl, I make sure that she runs all the pictures by me before sending them out anywhere. I don't want any more of me with that little moustache I used to have. I mean, I've never looked like Vincent Price, that's just ridiculous, but where's the sense in giving people ammunition? Anyway, clean shaven I look younger.

Oh, now this is interesting. Dennis Berridge had a blog, apparently. Hmm. Flicking through the recent entries, I'm afraid I have to say...oh, now, that's very negative. That's very harsh...I have to say he doesn't sound like someone that I'd have got on with. In the

science stream at school, then working as a physics teacher until it all got too much for him and he took an early retirement this last April. He sounds like a very bitter man. He starts off ranting about the Americans, the Christians, how they're saying that the Bible should be taught alongside evolution in the schools. Well, I don't see what's wrong with that, with putting both sides of the argument. Oh, here we go. It's Richard Dawkins this and Richard Dawkins that. There's all the old stuff about homeopathy, how can it work with the dilution and the rest of it, and I expect...yes, here we are. "Why isn't Doris Stokes keeping in touch more often since she died? Surely she still has books to push?" That's low. I'm sorry, that's just low. I mean, the woman's dead and she can't answer back. Show some respect, that's all I'm saying.

Thinking back, that must be what his brother meant when he said that he didn't know if the departed would approve of him consulting me. No, no, I'll bet he wouldn't. I'll bet Dennis would regard that as a bitter irony, the thought of someone like me having the last laugh. Wouldn't he just?

I memorise all the important details...a Great Dane called Benji that both twins were soft on when they were eleven, things like that...and then I smarten up the front room for when Mr. Berridge calls. There's not much that needs doing, just some little touches to create the proper atmosphere. I put the dimmers down a whisker and then light a joss-stick. I'm not sure what kind of incense it is technically. It's that sort that smells a bit pink, if you know what I mean. I put a couple of my most impressive ghost books on the coffee table. There's the Eliot O'Donnell *Haunted Britain* where the spider gave me a fright earlier, and a great big thing full of airbrushed angels, just there lying casually around as if I read them all the time when actually I'm not what you'd call a great reader. Even *Haunted Britain*, I just got it for the pictures, really. They're very impressive at first glance. You take the monk, 'PLATE II. PHOTOGRAPH OF A NOTORIOUS SOMERSET GHOST'. It's a proper what-I-call old-fashioned spooky apparition, manifesting on the well-lit landing of a fancy house in Bristol. Only when you've looked at it a minute or two do you notice how the light that's falling on the monk is coming from a different side to everything else in the picture, so that you can tell it's a double-exposure. And of course, you have to ask yourself what the photographer (a Mr. A.S. Palmer, it says in the caption) would be doing setting up his

camera and his lighting kit to take a picture of an empty stretch of landing. Still, like I say, it's effective if you only catch a glimpse of it.

Was that the doorbell? With the background music that I've got on now, *Rainforest Sounds*, there's some bits where it's very tinkly, like what are they called, wind-chimes, and it's difficult to tell if someone's at the door or not. It's only half-past seven so I shouldn't think it's time for my vessel of light yet, although I did say he could come early if he wanted. Even out here in the hallway, I can't make out if there's anybody there outside the frosted glass. It's probably just shadows from my hedge, but I expect I'd better check and see in case it's...

'Hello. Sorry, didn't mean to startle you. Would you be Mr. Sullivan?'

God, Ricky, get a grip. First it's a spider, and now this. I've heard of being highly strung and sensitive, but this is being an old woman like your dad said. Still, I make a good recovery.

'Yes. Yes, I am. I'm Ricky Sullivan, lovely to meet you. I hope you've not stood here long, only I had some music on and wasn't sure if I could hear the bell or not. You must be Mr. Berridge.'

He's just like his Facebook picture, except he's a bit more drawn and crumpled-looking since he had that took, a bit more haggard, which is the bereavement, I expect. He's standing framed there in the open doorway, letting all the cold in. He looks up and manages a weary little smile, bless.

'Mr. Berridge, yes, that's right. And no, I'd only just turned up. I hadn't even had a chance to ring the bell. You must have had one of those feelings that you fellers have.'

Well, there's a stroke of luck. He's half convinced and he's not even in the door yet.

'Oh, well, it's not much, but there's times when me having a God-given gift can come in handy. Anyway, come in the warm. We'll see what I can do to help you, shall we?'

He sidles in past me, still with that self-deprecating smile, and I shut the front door behind him. It's that

cold outside that you can feel it in the hallway, even with the heating up. There's no wind, and the fog's just hanging there like rubbed-out smudges on a pencil drawing. He goes through into the front room and sits down upon the sofa without taking his long mac off, which gives the impression that he's not anticipating staying very long. Well, we'll see about that.

'Mr. Berridge, can I just say that when you walked in, I got a very strong impression. Stronger than I usually pick up off of my regular vessels of light. You've recently been separated from somebody, am I right? Not just somebody close, but someone who was so close to you that I can't even imagine what it must have been like. No, no, let me finish. I'm getting a letter 'D' and what I think might be a name? Denzel? Is that right? Wait a minute...no. That's not right. No, it's Dennis. Definitely Dennis. And the picture that I'm getting...no, that must be wrong. That can't be right. I'm sorry, Mr. Berridge, but I think I'm going to have to let you down. I must be having an off night. I'm trying to get a picture of your loved one, but all I can see is...well, it's you, basically.'

Oh, yes. That's got his attention. He looks up into my eyes, with that same rueful little smile, and shakes his head in wonderment.

'It's my twin brother. That's who I've been separated from. I've got to say I didn't know if I should come to visit you like this, but, well, you're living up to all my hopes and expectations. So, can he say anything, my brother? Is there any message that he's got for me?'

I'm sorry, but I can't resist it, not when I've read all that rubbish on his brother's blog.

'Yes. Yes, there is. I'm not sure I can understand it properly, but I think Dennis wants to say that he was wrong. Does that make any sense? I'm sensing that he never thought there'd be an after-life, and that he might have had some harsh words about those of us who do. Is that an accurate impression, that I'm passing on? He's saying he wants to apologise, and he knows better now. He says it's wonderful, the place he's in. He's telling me that he's been reunited with old friends. He says to tell you he's with...Benjamin, or Benji? Is that right? Is that somebody that you used to know?'

To tell the truth, I threw that last bit in just on an impulse, but I've hit the jackpot, so to speak. He's

filling up. He's staring at me and his eyes are wet. The little smile he had is gone.

'Benji was...he was a Great Dane that we had when we were kids. Both of us loved him. But then, you know that already. Mr. Sullivan, to think that you could bring up a beloved childhood pet like that...you're truly unbelievable. If I had any doubts about what kind of man you were before I came to see you, they're all gone. And what you said, how Dennis was always so sure that there was no life after death and having to reluctantly admit that he was wrong, that all rings very true as well. That's very much what Dennis used to be like. Very much the cold-eyed rationalist. It must have took him by surprise, his current circumstances, but if I know him he'd see the funny side as well.'

The little smile's come back again. I'm not a one to brag, but I think we can chalk up this one as a victory for Ricky Sullivan. I'm wondering, if I offer a cup of tea and biscuits perhaps we can chat about his brother for a while and then I'll see him out, ching, fifty quid, but no, he's off again.

'Am I correct in thinking that you said you'd do a house-call for a hundred pounds? I wasn't certain earlier that it would be the proper thing to do, but like I say, that business about Benji, you've convinced me. You're the right person to do this with. I mean, surely you'd get a clearer message, wouldn't you, if we were in the actual house where Dennis lived?'

I'm nodding from the point where he mentioned the hundred pounds. Well, I must say, I hadn't thought this sounded very promising when David Berridge rang up earlier. He sounded so nervous and hesitant I wasn't even sure that he'd turn up, but listen to him now after he's had a dose of what I call the Ricky Sullivan effect. He's like a different person. He's more confident. It's like he's made his mind up. I think that's a measure of the magic I bring to a situation, just my personality.

'Well, yes, I'm sure that it'd make things clearer. More vibrations with a visit, obviously. Were you after making an appointment, or was it tonight that you were thinking of? I mean, I don't mind. With the bookings I've got coming up, tonight would actually be quite convenient.'

Meaning it's better from my point of view if we go now while he's still feeling the enthusiasm, rather than

giving him time to change his mind. But no, he's nodding. He looks eager.

'No, tonight is good. Tonight is perfect. It's not far. We could be there in twenty minutes.'

This is turning out to be a very profitable evening. For the house, I've still got plenty of material I haven't used, their parents names and so on, so I can give him his money's worth. I can give him a proper visitation. I wonder if I dare do his brother's voice? It's a safe bet that they'd sound very like each other, but you never know. His brother might have had a stammer or a lisp or something. We'll see how it goes, play it by ear. He stands up from the sofa with his hands still jammed deep in his raincoat pockets...he's not took them out the whole time that he's been here. He must be feeling the weather even worse than I am...and I take my scarf and leather coat down from the peg out in the hall so I can let us out. It cost a lot the coat, but you should see it on. It makes me look much taller and much more mysterious, like somebody from out *The X-Files* or *The Matrix*.

I shepherd him out the door, and while I lock it after us I hear the phone go. It might be another client, so my natural impulse is to pop back in and answer it, but no. I'll let it go. The answer-phone will pick it up, and anyway, if I'm that interested I can always call the landline when I'm out and see who left a message. When I put my keys back in my pocket I have a quick fumble and make sure I've got my mobile, safe inside a kiddie's knitted bootie, which is what I keep it in. I turn round and venture a breezy 'Right, shall we be off?' but David, Mr. Berridge, is already out the open front gate and away along the street, so that I have to hurry to catch up with him.

Oh, but it's bitter out tonight. It strikes right at you through your cardigan. I don't think that I can remember a December quite as cold as this since I was little. It's the kind of cold that takes you back, and with the fog it's dreadful. I'd forgotten, but it has a smell to it, does fog. It's like damp smoke or something, it's less of a smell than it's a miserable musty feeling in your nose. And there's a sort of cold burn in your airways when you breathe it. To be honest, I'll be glad to get the stuff with Berridge over with so I can get back home. It's, what, just after eight now. Twenty minutes there and twenty back, another twenty for the business, I could probably be back in time for *Q.I.* I'll admit, the

humour isn't always to my taste but you can find out all these interesting little facts, like how the sea-slug's actually a form of cucumber if I remember right. Isn't that fascinating? If only these sceptics, all these types like Mr. Berridge's late brother, if they could just open up their eyes and see how marvellous and inexplicable God's wonders really are, like with the nature and that, then perhaps they wouldn't be so smug and certain when it came to voicing their opinions. Because that's all that they are, opinions. None of us can really know for certain, can we, what awaits us on the other side? I must say, I wish Mr. Berridge would slow down a bit. Still, he's keen. That's the main thing.

We walk down the road beside the park and then cross that dual carriageway that's at the bottom end. It's funny, but for saying that it's so near Christmas, there's hardly a soul about. Must be the weather, keeping them indoors. Or the recession. People always look so worried and so tense this time of year. It's very stressful, isn't it, trying to live up to everybody's expectations? Not that I find it a problem, Christmas. To be honest, I always look forward to it. I mean, ever since my mother passed I haven't really anyone to buy for, so it's not a great expense. I know that for some people it's a very lonely time, and that it's when you get most of the suicides and that, but speaking personally I always find I get a little bulge in clients and consultations around January, so it's an ill wind and so forth.

There's kebab-shop neon and occasionally a set of headlights burning through the fog. We walk along by the dual carriageway for a few minutes, then we cross another main road that runs off downhill. I'm too puffed keeping up with him to make much of a go at conversation, but it's not like there's an awkward silence. We're just eager to get where we're going, for our different reasons. He's thinking about his brother and I'm thinking about Stephen Fry and that hundred-and-fifty quid.

You know, in all the years I've lived where I am now, I've never had much cause to come down this way previously, and never as far as this. It's what I think of as one of the rougher neighbourhoods, where most of it's all tower blocks but where you'll get the odd building going back to Cromwell's time or even earlier. I don't know why they don't just pave it over, put a precinct up or something, with some nice pavement cafés. It's probably the riff-raff down here with their

tenant's rights and everything that's stopping it from happening. I know that this sounds awful, but if we have a bad winter, what with all these cuts, it might thin out some of the obstacles around these parts and end up being the best thing that's ever happened to the district. There. I'm sorry, but I've said it.

If you want the honest truth I think it's areas like this that are the real ghosts, aren't they? Mouldy old things, dead things from hundreds of years ago that have no right to still be making an appearance in the present day, with all their creaking woodwork and their rattling chains. These terrible young men with their pale, undernourished faces and their hoodie tops, like apparitions, like the monk in Mr. A.S. Palmer's photograph. Shrieks in the night and phantom bloodstains on the paving slabs outside a takeaway that will have disappeared by the next afternoon, it is, it's like a gothic novel. And just like a ghost, a neighbourhood like this will hang around for centuries with all its flapping rags and its depressing atmosphere. It's an accusing presence, making everyone feel guilty about things that happened before most of us were born. It's not our fault if people were too lazy to make something of themselves and find a better place to live. Leave us alone.

Oh, look at that. A great big lump of dog's mess on the pavement. That's disgusting. I'm lucky I spotted it, what with the fog. If Dennis Berridge had to live round here, all I can say is that he can't have been much of a physics teacher. Or perhaps he was, but never got on in the education system as it is now. Either way, it must have made him bitter that somewhere like this was all he could afford. Reading his blog, I sensed he was a very angry man. You'll often find that people who say nasty things about spiritual healers, which is how I see myself, you'll often find that it's their own frustrations and their failures that they're really cross about, deep down inside. His brother David here, though, seems much more contented in himself, more open-minded and more likeable. Walking a pace or two ahead he turns and glances back across his shoulder at me with his funny smile that, frankly, in the useless lamplight that they have down here, is looking a bit ghastly. Doesn't look like a vessel of light, let's put it that way, but you must remember that he's had a blow, the poor soul.

'Not far now. Dennis's house is just along the end here.'

Well, thank God for that. If we'd have had to go much further, I think I'd have wanted rabies shots. I'm sorry, but I would. This street we're on, it's like a terraced row with little badly-kept front gardens, most of them with the gates hanging off or missing altogether. David takes a right turn up the pathway of a pebble-dashed affair and I follow behind him. The house looks to be in a better condition than the other properties along here, although not by much. It's shabby, and the paint's all peeling off round the front doorway, but at least its windows aren't smashed in and patched with plasterboard like that house that we just passed two doors down. Someone had drawn a willy on its wood fence with black spray-paint and it's had, you know, the stuff, the droplets coming out the end. Who wants to see that? They've got ugly minds, some people. Ugly minds.

'I'll tell you what, I'll just check round the side to see that all the windows and back door are still alright since Dennis died. He kept a key under that flowerpot, next to the front doorstep there. Let yourself in, and if they've cut off the electric there's a big torch in the passage, just inside the door.'

This is a bit irregular but, still, a hundred pounds. I have a job finding the plant-pot in the dark and then my fingertips are that cold that they're numb, so that I've only just unlocked the door and found the torch that Mr. Berridge mentioned when he's back from his inspection, standing there behind me. I can't see his face in this light, but I know he'll have that weary, gormless smile showing his rabbit teeth, that little overbite he's got. I switch the torch on and it throws a puddle of tea-coloured light along the passageway, so I can see the bottom the stairs. I think that's...no. Is it? I think that's the old-fashioned stair-rods showing, brass ones like they used to have. That's shameful. You're not telling me a science teacher couldn't have afforded to splash out on fitted carpets?

Mr. Berridge slips in past me, and I notice he leaves me to shut the door behind us, thank you very much. Born in a field, as my mum used to say. Not that shutting the door has made a scrap of difference to the cold. If anything, its colder indoors than it was outside and there's that smell, the smell of other people's houses. With the better sort of residences you don't notice it, they all just smell of Glade or something, mine does, but in poorer people's houses you can smell all the fish fingers and the dirty socks going back years,

like it's accumulated in the furniture. I try the light-switch in the hall, but nothing happens. I doubt that the council would cut somebody's electric off so soon after they'd died, so probably what happened was he hadn't paid his bill. I think it's better if I hurry things along a bit, get to the business, so to speak. I don't want to spend too long here.

'Well, now, this is very atmospheric, Mr. Berridge. Very atmospheric. I can almost feel Dennis's presence, as if he were right here next to me. I sense that he's concerned about you, worried that you're suffering needlessly over his death. He's saying that he doesn't want you to be hurt.'

I angle up the torch-beam from where it's been playing over the unappetising wallpaper and the chipped skirting board and there they are, the goofy teeth and mournful smile as he considers.

'Yes, that sounds like Dennis. We were always ever so protective of each other, being twins. If either of us were in any trouble or had someone picking on them, then the other would be on it like a ton of bricks. Dennis particularly. Out of us two, Dennis was always the bloody-minded one.'

Why am I not surprised? Anyone who can fume for pages about chiropractors and the like is hardly likely to be someone normal who just lets things go. I'm frankly glad I never met him. He sounds like a nightmare.

'He sounds like a lovely, very caring man. Just let me ask you, was there a possession or an object Dennis was especially attached to, something I could touch? I find it often makes the contact stronger, that's all. It could be a favourite pair of slippers or a record he was fond of. Literally, it could be anything. Just something so I can make a connection with him.'

There's the smile again. It's probably the torchlight bouncing round this narrow passageway, but it looks almost pitying, or even condescending. Oh, it's very cold in here. It's icy.

'Well, if you want something so you can connect with Dennis, I think if I popped upstairs a minute I might come back with the very thing. Go in the living room and make yourself at home.'

He turns and walks towards the stairs, then he looks back at me, and...no. No, his voice is very faint and I can hardly make it out. He's asking if I'd like...don't know. A cuppa? Is he offering to make a cup of tea? I shake my head, smiling politely.

'No, no, I'll be fine. You go ahead and I'll wait in the living room.'

He turns and walks up the stairs very casually for saying there's no lights on, although obviously he's more familiar with the place than I am. I'm guessing he's spent a lot of time here.

I push the door open and I sweep my torch around the living room. God, this is a depressing little hole for somebody to spend their final years in. There's three bookshelves, mostly science and science-fiction from the look of it, and there's no television. Two sagging armchairs with one each side of an old three-bar fire. I've not seen one of them in years. Upstairs I can hear Mr. Berridge walking back and forth as he looks for whatever piece of sentimental tat he's going to bring back down for me to go into my Vulcan mind-meld with. It'll be Richard Dawkins' autograph, I shouldn't wonder. If he's going to be a while then I suppose I could risk sitting on one of the chairs and rest my feet after that walking. I hope he's not long. It's twenty-five to nine already and I'm going to miss the start of *Q.I.* unless Mr. Berridge gets a move on. Sitting in the dark like this, well, it's not how I like to spend my Friday evenings, put it that way.

Oh, hang on, there was that call I had when I was just locking the front door, wasn't there? While Charley-Boy's upstairs having a weep over his brother's keepsakes I can at least check on that and see if there's another client in the pipeline. Honestly, my fingers, fishing out the bootee with the iPhone in from my coat pocket, they're half-frozen. If it gets much colder they'll be falling off.

Dialling the number and the suffix that connects me to the answer-phone takes ages. Clump-clump-clump upstairs, the footsteps through the ceiling. Thinking back, it didn't sound like 'cuppa', what he offered me when he was just about to go up. It was more like 'phantom' or a word like that, except that doesn't make...ah! Here we are. The girl's voice tells me I was called at eight o'clock and then there's the long pause before it plays the message.

Fanta. That's what he said. 'Ricky? Would you like a Fanta?' But why should he...

'Mr. Sullivan? I'm sorry, this is David Berridge. Listen, I've been talking to my wife and, well, I'm sorry, I've had second thoughts about coming to see you. I don't think it's anything that the departed would have wanted. I'm sorry to cancel the appointment and I hope I haven't, like, put you about or anything. Anyway, thanks again, and sorry. Um, you take care. Bye. Bye....'

What? Is this...is he playing a trick or something, calling from upstairs, just some mean joke to make me...no, he didn't call. It's me who called, what am I thinking? It's the landline, isn't it? The landline at my house. I called and it said eight o'clock and he was with me then, outside my gate. There must be, I don't know, there must be something that explains this, calm down, Ricky, something I've not thought of, and in just a minute I'll be laughing at how daft I am. Because if David Berridge, if he rang at eight to call it off, if he's still sat at home, then...

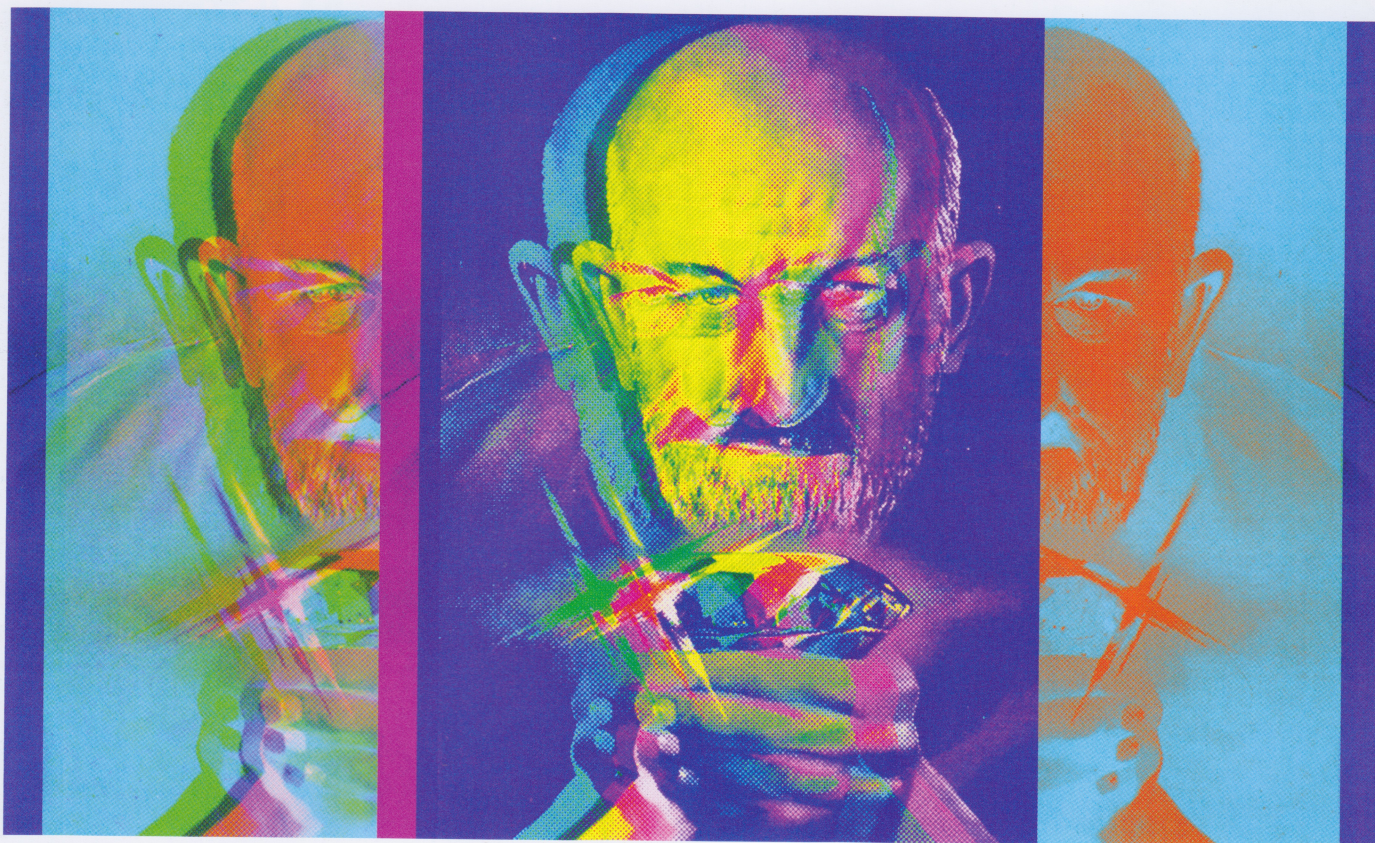
Up above me on the landing there's a creak. Somebody's coming down the stairs. I'm sorry.

I'm so sorry.









Lama from Devon

by Steve Holland

A story of third eyes, flying monks and how the wisdom of the ancients was revealed to T. Lobsang Rampa, the guru from Plympton.

"Lobsang! Our decision is made. The hour has come for you to write again. This next book will be a vital task. You must write stressing one theme, that one person can take over the body of another, with the latter person's full consent."

I stared in dismay and almost broke the telepathic contact. *Me write again? About that.* I was a 'controversial figure' and hated every moment as such. I knew that I was all that I claimed to be, that all I had written before was the absolute truth, but how would it help to rake up a story from the lurid press's silly season? — *The Rampa Story*, 1960

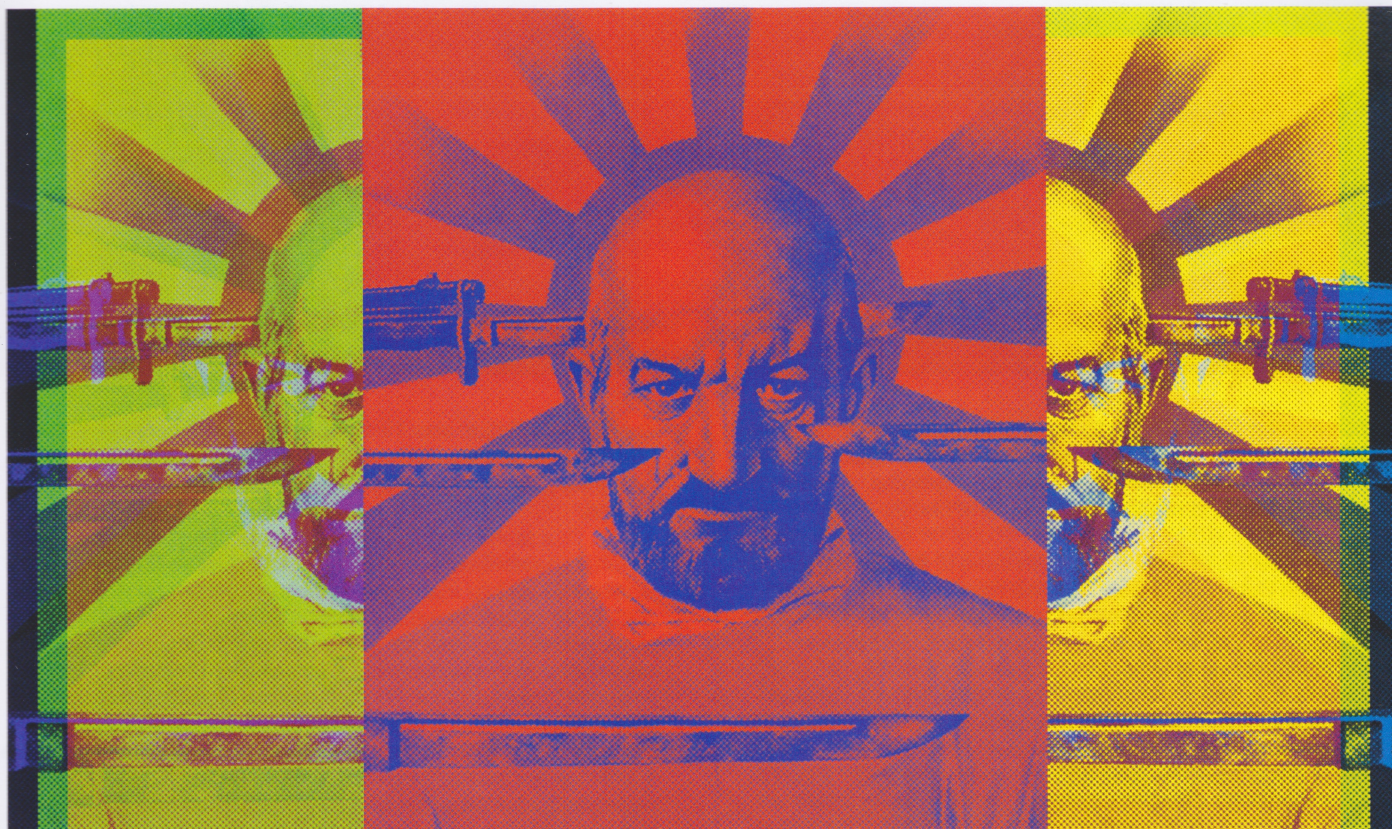
On October 29, 1956, Secker & Warburg published *The Third Eye* by Lobsang Rampa. Subtitled 'The Autobiography of a Tibetan Lama', the book revealed how Rampa had studied at Lhasa and became a lama. Born in 1905, he was the son of a nobleman of Tibet with considerable influence in the affairs of the country. He spent his early days at home near the Potala, near the Kaling Chu (Happy River) although it was not a happy time; an elder brother died at the age of six, leaving Lobsang with one sister. At the age of seven, Lobsang was told by the state astrologers that he should enter the Chakpori Lamasery to be taught in medicine; here he was trained by Lama Mingyar Dondup, a very capable clairvoyant, in the mysteries of astral travelling, and at the age of eight, Lobsang was operated upon to open up his 'third eye', "that special organ of clairvoyance which is moribund in most people because they deny its existence. With this 'eye' seeing, I was able to distinguish the human aura and so divine the intention of those around me... The aura can tell the whole medical history of a person. By determining what is *missing* from the aura, and replacing the deficiencies by special radiations, people can be cured of illness."

Lobsang's naturally strong powers of clairvoyance bought him to the attention of the Dalai Lama and was eventually considered fit to take the Ceremony of the Little Death in which he was placed in a state of cataleptic death far beneath the Potala and journeyed into the past, as related in *The Third Eye*.

The book was an instant success, but even before its publication there were rumblings that the author, Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, was not all he seemed. Accurate information on Far Eastern philosophies was not widely available in Britain at that time, although Buddhist and Hindu — or at least pseudo-Buddhist and pseudo-Hindu — philosophies had been drawn on extensively in the mystical/occult teachings of the Theosophical Society founded by Mme. Blavetsky, Col. Henry S. Olcott and others in New York in 1875. Blavetsky was well known for her publications on paranormal phenomena but was denounced as a fraud by the Society for Psychical Research. She moved to Europe and settled in London where she wrote *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and *The Key To Theosophy* (1889) before her death in 1891.

The Theosophical Society split into various groups shortly after her death, extolling different aspects of Hindu-Buddhist and other esoteric philosophies (later dubbed 'eastern' philosophies as a way of legitimising them). In England, the Buddhist Society was founded in 1924 by Travers Christmas Humphreys, a Barrister-at-Law at the Inner Temple (later Chief Prosecuting Counsel to the Crown at the Old Bailey) and a prolific writer on Buddhism from the 1920s on. Eastern philosophy was a popular subject of books in post-war years, but to the majority of the population, knowledge of the far east seemed to be limited to the *Kama Sutra* and then only for its rumoured explicitly sexual content.

Before it was seen by Secker & Warburg, *The Third Eye* had already been turned down by E.P. Dutton of New York who had sent the manuscript to Hugh Richardson who concluded it was "a fake built from published works and embellished by a fertile imagination." When the book was submitted to Secker & Warburg, the company's director, Fredric Warburg, met with



the author who, reading his palm, correctly stated Warburg's age and claimed that he had recently been involved in a criminal case — information that was readily available to every newspaper reader who had followed the obscene publications case brought against Secker & Warburg for publishing *The Philanderer* by Stanley Kauffmann. Warburg seemed swayed by the sincerity of the author... probably that rather than Rampa's claim that Secker & Warburg were karmically the right publisher for his book.

After making a number of corrections based on Richardson's report, Warburg sent the manuscript out to twenty experts whose reports were universally negative. Agehananda Bharati, a professor of anthropology and one of twenty experts, recalled in an essay entitled 'Fictitious Tibet'

"Every page bespeaks the utter ignorance of the author of anything that has to do with Buddhism as practiced and Buddhism as a belief system in Tibet or elsewhere. But the book also shows a shrewd intuition into what millions of people want to hear. Monks and neophytes flying through the mysterious breeze on enormous kites; golden images in hidden cells, representing earlier incarnations of the man who views them; arcane surgery in the skull to open up the eye of wisdom; tales about the dangers of mystical training and initiation — in a Western world so desperately seeking for the mysterious where everything is so terribly accessible to inspection, where the divine has been bowdlerized or institutionalized, where it speaks with the wagging-finger lingo of moralistic nagging, the less hardy and the softer will seek that which is the opposite of all these turn-off factors...

"Within about half a year from the time I read the manuscript, and reported to the publishers that the book is a fraud and should not be published, Messrs. Secker & Warburg evidently also asked other Tibetologists and people who know the subject matter, among them Hugh Richardson, the last British and the last Indian Government Resident in Lhasa; Marco Pallis, the British scholar-traveller; and Heinrich Harrer of *Seven Years in Tibet* fame, whom Mr. Richardson had once put under arrest in Lhasa. All of these people concurred, and

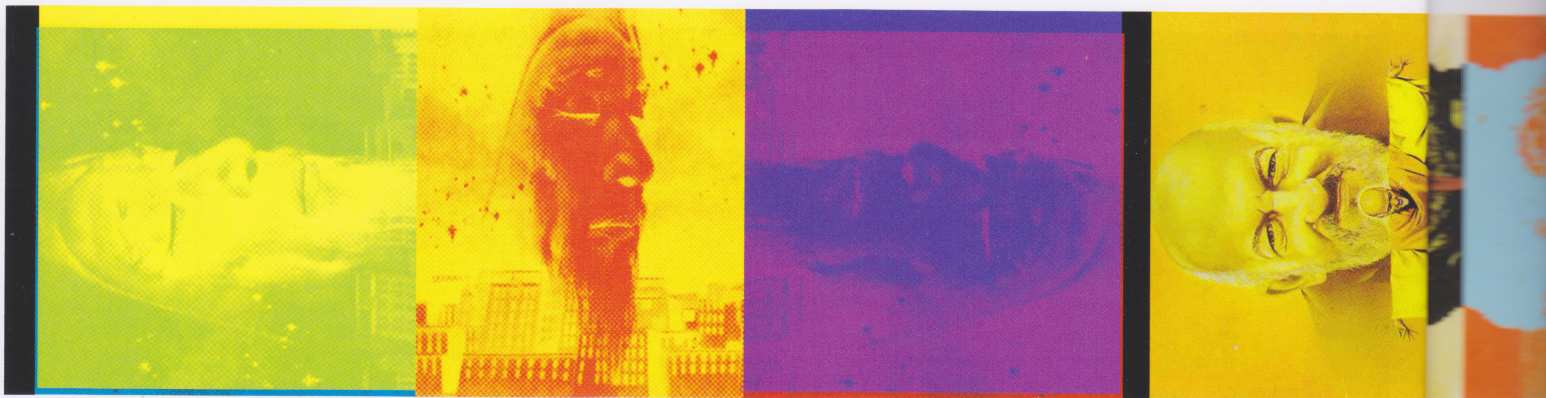
gave the publishers independent, identical reports: the book is a fraud, and the man is a fake. However, publishers are not the harbingers of authenticity, but businessmen. They published the book in spite of the negative reports, anticipating its sales potential. And they were right."

Warburg approached Rampa and offered to publish the book as fiction, but Rampa insisted that it was a work of fact. Faced with the option of publishing or dropping the book entirely, Warburg decided on the former, but added a preface to the work to protect the reputation of the firm, claiming that "The autobiographical account of the experiences of a Tibetan lama is such an exceptional document that it is difficult to establish its authenticity," and that the opinions of the twenty experts consulted "were so contradictory that we could not obtain a positive result."

Secker & Warburg had a hit on their hands. The book went through nine editions in hardcover in Britain alone and sold some 300,000 copies in its first 18 months. An American edition was published by Doubleday & Co. in 1957. The German edition sold 100,000 copies and the French edition 49,000 copies in its first year of publication; translations were also snapped up in Italy, Spain and Portugal. An astonishing success for a book so vilified before it even saw print.

The Tibetan scholars who had been consulted were infuriated that publication had gone ahead despite their negative reports and gave the book some of its most damning reviews. Acting on behalf of his fellow experts, Marcus Pallis hired a Liverpool private detective named Clifford Burgess to learn more about the author. Burgess soon discovered that, far from being a Tibetan lama, Lobsang Rampa was actually Cyril Henry Hoskin, the Devon-born son of a plumber, and had never been out of the country.

Born in Plympton St Maurice, near Plymouth, on April 8, 1910, Hoskin was the second child of Joseph Henry Hoskin, a master plumber born in Plymouth, and Eva Hoskin (née Martin). Young Cyril attended the local village school, leaving at the age of fifteen, a somewhat odd child who was happier



experimenting with electrical things and insects than playing with other children. Rather spoiled and of delicate health, Hoskin worked occasionally at his father's shop in Plympton, but was considered lazy and would sometimes lie in bed for days.

Hoskin's elder sister, Winifred, was married to the Reverend Illingsworth Butler, and Hoskin and his mother went to live with them in Annesley following his father's death in 1937. In 1940 they moved to Warwick Avenue in London and Hoskin found work as a manager at a surgical goods manufacturing company. He soon left to become a correspondence clerk at a correspondence school. When the school moved to Weybridge, Surrey, due to the Blitz, Hoskin and his new wife — he had married a nurse at a Richmond hospital named Sarah Anne Pattinson on August 13, 1940 — lived in a flat provided by the firm.

During the war years, Hoskin's manner became increasingly strange. Interested in the occult, he had read books extensively in libraries around London; now his fellow workers noticed his manner becoming more and more peculiar. He used to take his cat out for walks on a lead and shaved off all the hair on his head. He also began calling himself Kuan-suo or Dr. Ku'an and legally changed his name to Carl Kuan Suo towards the end of 1947.

Leaving the correspondence school in September 1948, Hoskin (or Kuan Suo) continued to live in Weybridge for some months before moving to south London; his movements between 1950 and 1954, during which time he appears to have had a number of jobs, including that of a photographer and working for a career counselling firm, remain somewhat vague.

Soon after being fired from the latter company, Kuan Suo approached a literary agency with two manuscripts, one on corsets (putting to use the knowledge he had gained working for a surgical goods manufacturer) and another on Tibet.

The fraud was exposed in the *Scottish Daily Mail* (February 1, 1958) under the headline 'Third Eye Lama Exposed as Fake' and stories immediately began to appear in many other newspapers and magazines.

The world-wide success of the book meant that the discoveries about 'Dr. Kuan', then living with his wife and the wife of a broker, Mrs. Shelling Roose, in a villa perched on the hills overlooking Dublin, were also worldwide headlines.

Confronted with this evidence, Kuan Suo remained unfazed and maintained that everything he had written was the truth and that, whilst he had formerly been Cyril Henry Hoskin, his body had been taken over by the spirit of Tuesday Lobsang Rampa on June 13, 1949.

Frederic Warburg, on the other hand, claimed (in the *Daily Express*, February 3, 1958) that he had been suspicious from the first. He had asked one of his experts to translate the question "Did you have a nice journey, Mr. Rampa?" and read out the phrase at their next meeting. When Rampa did not answer, Warburg mentioned that it was Tibetan and Rampa dropped to the floor, apparently in agony. He explained to Warburg that because of the torture he had undergone at the hands of the Japanese

seeking information about Tibet, he had hypnotically blocked his knowledge of the language and hearing it spoken now caused him great pain...so it would be unwise for Warburg to press him further!

Sarah Anne Hoskin was quoted at the time as saying that the whole of *The Third Eye* was a fabrication, written because her husband had failed at various jobs and they needed the money. Many years later, Rampa told Alain Stanké that a journalist had offered his wife a considerable sum if she would denounce the writings of her husband. "Naturally she refused, but all it proved was that a certain type of journalism does not hesitate to falsify the truth; indeed, it cannot bear the truth." Mrs. Rampa later wrote that it took her several years to become attuned to the idea that a new spirit had entered the body of her husband and at the time she was interviewed believed that the books he was writing were fantasies.

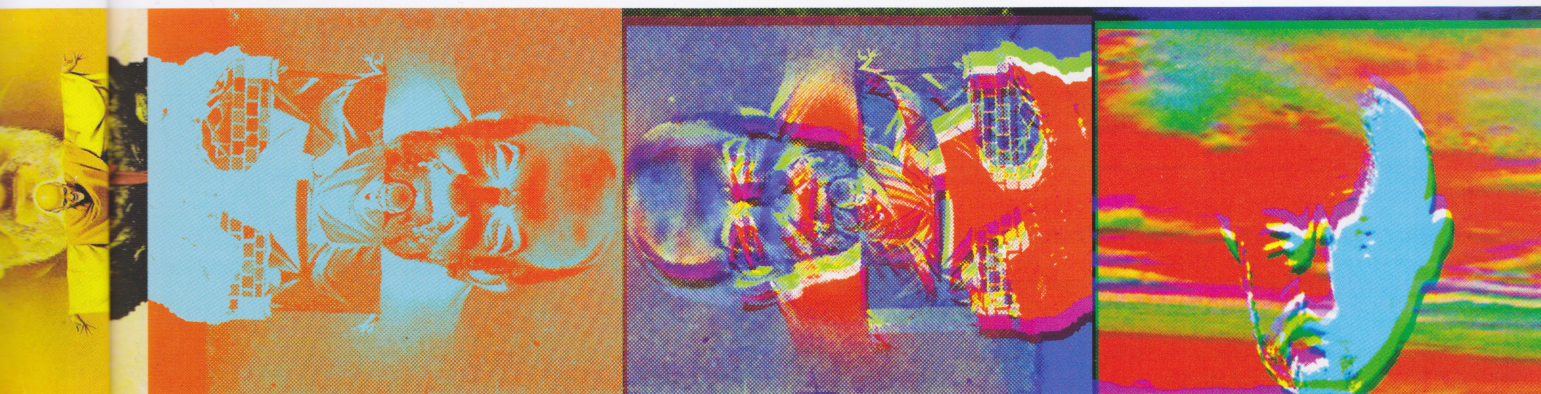
Secker & Warburg did not publish Hoskin's follow-up to *The Third Eye*. Instead, *Doctor From Lhasa* appeared from Souvenir Press in 1959 and continued the story of Lobsang Rampa, revealing how he left Lhasa in 1927 and went to the University of Chungking in China where he studied to be a surgeon and physician. He returned briefly to Tibet at the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama before taking up a position with the Chinese Air Force in Shanghai. Captured by the Japanese after the invasion in 1937, Rampa was put in charge of a prison camp for women in Japan. Escaping in a fishing boat after the bombing of Hiroshima, Rampa found himself in Najin, and made his way to Russia and then west towards Europe. During the journey he was contacted by his former mentor and guide Lama Mingyar Dondup in the form of a telepathic cat.

Travelling through Poland, Switzerland and Germany into France, Rampa gets into a brawl in Verdun, beating up a man during an argument and breaking his leg: "Apologise nicely, or I will beat you up some more," says Rampa.

Rampa travelled to America where things went badly for him; he was accused of being a stowaway and had to escape from the police. Exhausted, he slept for two days, his mind travelling to the Land of Golden Light where, through the Akashic Record, he studied the life of an Englishman, an aircraft spotter during the war. Unemployed, the Englishman tried (unsuccessfully) to get a job as a War Reserve Policeman; eventually finding employment with a Correspondence School with whom he had once studied. The Englishman, Rampa discovers, has been dreaming of the East — astral travelling with the help of a Guru — and had later changed his name by Deed Poll to something with (almost) the right vibrations as indicated by the Science of Numbers.

Entering an astral state for the last time, the Englishman exchanged bodies with Rampa. "For a long time, Sir, I have hated life in England, the unfairness of it, the favouritism," explained the Englishman. "All my life I have been interested in Tibet and Far Eastern countries. All my life I have had 'dreams' in which I saw, or seemed to see, Tibet, China, and other countries which I did not recognize. Some time ago I had a strong impulse to change my name by legal deed, which I did." During their conversations,





the Englishman discussed his first contact with a Tibetan lama following a gardening accident at his home at Rose Croft, Thames Ditton.

The newly emerged Lobsang Rampa found work at a photographic processing works in Clapham for three months before non-payment drove him to seek work elsewhere whilst earning a little money from concocting medicines from herbs. Eventually a friend suggested that he try free-lance writing; a friend of the friend sent him along to an agent in Regent Street who suggested he should write a book about himself. Rampa prepared a 30-page synopsis which was accepted by a publisher. As he finished the book, he suffered a heart attack and as a result moved to Dublin with his wife and cat (a Siamese called Lady Ku'ei) where he completed *Doctor From Lhasa*. Unfortunately, the high rates of income tax forced him to leave and he travelled to Windsor, Canada, having added Mrs. Fifi Greywhiskers to his entourage.

Later, in Toronto, Hoskin founded an ashram-like community with a medium-sized following, selling 'religious' objects such as 'blessed' crystals and pendants to his followers. His publishers advertised Dr. Rampa's Tranquillizer Touch-Stones, mentioned in *Wisdom Of The Ancients* and available for 37 shillings from Rampa-Touch-Stones Ltd. at an address in Loughborough, Leicestershire, as well as a 12" instruction record on how to meditate (33 shillings).

He also continued to write: *The Rampa Story* appeared in 1960 which told the story of how he had journeyed west and taken over the body of Cyril Henry Hoskin. Corgi Books had published *The Third Eye* in 1959 and *Doctor From Lhasa* in 1960, the former selling 150,000 copies, and from 1963, when they published *The Cave Of The Ancients*, became his sole British publishers. His books expanded on his life and journeys: *Cave Of The Ancients* offered more of the story of his experiences in the *Lamaseries of Tibet* and *The Saffron Robe* (1966) detailed his early life at the Lamasery of Potala; some were explorations of the Rampa philosophy or instruction courses in psychic development and metaphysics; others, such as *Living With The Lama* by Mrs. Fifi Greywhiskers — the book translated from the original Siamese cat language by Rampa — were just downright bizarre. Corgi Books had sold four million copies of his books by the time of his death.

In 1973, Québécois journalist Alain Stanké wrote *Rampa, Imposteur ou initié*. Stanké had known Rampa in Montreal for several years and was the first to obtain a televised interview, although his friendship did not prevent him from studying Rampa and his work impartially and allowing Rampa the chance to answer his critics whilst also raising the ghosts of some events Rampa would, no doubt, have preferred to have remained buried. "The press, television and radio have, as one could only expect, refused to give my version of the facts. They refused to print or transmit my declaration concerning the absolute truth that it contained in my books," Stanké quotes.

One question raised by Stanké was the case of a young Québécois student from Boucherville who, in November 1972, committed suicide. A copy of *Les Secrets de l'aura* (a translation

of *You—Forever!*) was found in his effects which was made a scapegoat by the press. "I challenged the slanderous ones — as I challenge you now — to show me where in any of my books I advocate suicide," Rampa told Stanké. A disillusioned disciple, Stanké ended his book with the words "Adieu Lobsang!" ("Good-bye, Lobsang!") although he continued to publish French translations of Rampa's books in Canada into the 1980s.

Hoskin died of heart trouble in Calgary, Alberta, on January 25, 1981. The last Lobsang Rampa book, *Tibetan Sage*, was published by Corgi in December 1980. His wife, Sarah Anne Hoskin, also wrote three books for Corgi, published under the pen-name Mama San Ra'Ab Rampa; her last book was translated into French as *Rampa: Lumière et sagesse* and published in Montreal by Alain Stanké in 1982.

Not that his death has stopped the Rampa story any more than the revelations of his real origins did twenty-three years earlier. Rampa's odd mixture of Buddhism and make-believe attracted the attention of UFO followers and a rejected section of one of his books in which he detailed an astral visit to Venus was published by Gray Barker and the Saucerian Press in around 1966. Rampa was unhappy about its publication — perhaps he felt that UFO followers were a lunatic fringe too far — but allowed the 42-page *My Visit To Venus* booklet to be printed.

More "lost writings" surfaced among the belongings of James Rigberg, the former owner of the Flying Saucer News Bookshop in New York. A collection, *The Long Lost Books Of T. Lobsang Rampa: My Visit To Agharta*, appeared in January 2003. His publishers, Global Communications, publishers of the *Conspiracy Journal*, noted that "what made Rampa different from other 'teachers' is he did not push any of his experiences down the throats of others, but in a simple, humble fashion, told of a more peaceful life style which had come to him after years of hardship in his homeland. Tibet had been invaded by the Chinese communists, and many monks and adepts had to flee for their lives. But Rampa was able to survive due to his deep understanding and application of cosmic laws he had learned from several sources, including masters of the planet Venus, as well as beings from the Inner Earth."

My Travels to Agharta details Rampa's journey to the sacred land located in the Hollow Earth. "This pilgrimage to the caverns under the planet resulted in a gathering of millions of enlightened souls from throughout the universe. There, Rampa received a personal message from the Creator of the universe for all mankind. This message has great significance for the ultimate fate of each and every one of us." Agharta and the Hollow Earth was one of the subjects covered by Rampa in *Twilight* (1975).

Most of Lobsang Rampa's books are long out of print in Britain, but remain in print in America and Europe. An admirer of Rampa's named Daniel Harris had the name of Dr. Tuesday Lobsang Rampa recorded on a CD mounted on the Mars 2001 Lander (certificate no. 271776) and both Tuesday Lobsang Rampa and Sarah Rampa are among the one million names placed on the Stardust spacecraft which visited Comet Wild 2 in 2004. Stardust returned to Earth in 2006, almost 25 years to the day Rampa departed.

Ghost Doctor

'The way out is via the door. Why will no one use this method?' - Confucius

I was a bright boy. The eldest son of middle-class academic parents, I fooled my way through school and got by with the minimum of effort. I did my degree in Philosophy at Sussex University, near Brighton. After three years oscillating between frustrated hedonism and depressive lethargy, I faced my finals. I had four weeks to write 30,000 words and revise for five exams. I had a dream:

I'm on the games pitch at school. Ranks of soldiers are marching down the field. They're wearing Busbies like the ones outside Buckingham Palace. They're pinioned by metal rods - like a giant game of table football. Mr Walton is shouting at me. A giant clock tower looms over the pitch, with lots of hands crazily rotating at different speeds. I try and march in step with the soldiers, but instead of moving forward, I rise into the air...

I woke in utter panic. I had always believed I was as an undiscovered genius. Now I would be exposed as a lazy, deluded poser. I spent that morning in furious masturbation, like the inmate of some squalid lunatic asylum. After each wrenching orgasm I dissolved into catatonia, only to awaken to a vicious new reality, my anxiety compounded by each previous act of self-pollution. Evening found me in a broken armchair staring into a cup of milky tea, trying to calculate a fatal dose of paracetamol. This too was beyond me: maths and chemistry were not my forte. Snivelling quietly, I contemplated the dead screen of a rented TV. I fished the remote out of the ashtray and pressed the red button:

An old man appeared on the screen, picking out a whimsical melody on a piano with fag-stained fingers, a beaker of whiskey on the casement.

A caption appeared:

Did You Used To Be R.D. Laing?

R.D Laing was a Glaswegian Psychiatrist. He died of a heart attack in St Tropez at the age of 62, during a game of tennis. He was the most brilliant and original British psychiatrist of the late twentieth century. He was a violent, narcissistic drunk.

He was a bright boy. The only son of a loveless, lower-middle class marriage, a career as a pianist was ruled out by a controlling Presbyterian mother, and a wrist injury. He was hothoused into a medical degree at Glasgow University where he developed an interest in Sartre, hypnotism and whisky.

In his first year, he witnessed his first surgical procedure. The patient was an aged sailor, riddled with gangrene and too frail to survive the anaesthetic; the doctors prescribed whisky and an ice-pack. The parsimonious nurse gave him a four-ounce hospital regulation bottle - it didn't touch the sides. The old soak screamed and convulsed as they sawed his rotten leg off, Old Skool.

In his third year, Laing attended a childbirth in Dublin. After a 14 hour labour, a headless monster emerged. It had long arms, no nose, no neck and a frog-like mouth where the head should have been. Laing was given a warm newspaper parcel to take to the pathology lab. An hour later he found himself drifting down O'Connell Street with a dead mutant baby under his arm. He dived into the nearest pub, put the package on the bar and began downing whiskies. Laing was seized by an urge to unwrap it and hold it up for all the world to see. 'A Ghastly Gorgon's head, to turn the world to stone.'


'These terrible diseases I saw turned me against any God who was supposed to be omnipotent and good....I was terrified of him if he existed and terrified if He did not. Life was a ghastly joke.' (*Wisdom, Madness and Folly* p. 75)

After a drunken speech at his final year dinner concerning 'The Syphilisation of Society' Laing was failed in all subjects. While waiting to re-sit his exams, he took up an internship at the Glasgow and West Scotland Neurosurgical Unit near Loch Lomond. He was soon wrist-deep in brains. It was an area of great natural beauty, popular with young tourists; there was a nice little pub by the Loch. Saturday afternoons would see Laing attempting to illuminate the inner cranium of some pissed up motorcyclist who'd been dumped at the clinic with his brain oozing out of his head. He fainted twice.

'She was nineteen, and a circus horse rider. She and her horse fell. The horse rolled over her head and had to be destroyed...When she came round she was a horse. She looked like a horse. She had a horse's eyes. She neighed. She grazed on the grass outside the ward, naked, on all fours...I wanted desperately to understand this sort of thing.' (*Ibid* p. 87)

In 1951 Laing was drafted into the British Army Psychiatric Unit at Netley, a horrtorium of screaming shellshockers and pale malingerers. Lobotomies were common practice. Along with the customary tranquilizers, Lieutenant Laing administered electric shocks, put people in straitjackets and padded cells, and injected them with insulin, inducing epileptic fits and death-like comas. Conversation between staff and psychotics was forbidden. His drinking increased. It seemed all the grim paraphernalia of modern psychiatry was designed, not for the prevention, but the manufacture of madness. And he was part of it.





Late one night Laing's ear was caught by the rantings of a young lunatic. 'John' was the son of an army officer and a prostitute. After failing his university entrance exams he'd been forced by his father into the army, where he'd suffered a complete mental breakdown. He'd been placed in a padded cell after trying to bash his brains out against a brick wall. Laing decided to let the man rave for a bit before administering the customary injection. Defying protocol, he had the door opened, entered the cell, rested his legs...and listened. 'John' calmed down. No injection was needed. Laing returned the next night, and the next...He didn't diagnose or analyse, just hung out, lounging on the floor, sharing the night, and the odd bottle of whisky, with his new friend. John's cell became, for Laing as much as him, a refuge, an *Asylum* in the classical sense. After a while he discovered he could understand the man's gnomic babble, and even enter into his fantasies. After a few weeks 'John' became lucid and was discharged. They maintained a warm correspondence for several years.

'The New Year is the biggest celebration in Scotland. It is marked by profound carousing on the part of the alcoholic fraternity...There is a special spirit abroad...' 'A man's a man for a' that...'...I have seen catatonic patients who could hardly move, or utter a word...smile, laugh, shake hands, wish someone 'a guid New Year' and even dance...if any drug had this effect...it would be world famous...The intoxicant here however is not a drug, not even alcoholic spirits, but the celebration of a spirit of fellowship.' (Ibid p.29)

On Demobilisation, Laing was appointed to the Royal Gartnavel hospital in Glasgow, and put in charge of 60 of the looniest women in Scotland. Here he followed up his revolutionary treatment of not electrocuting patients and being friendly to them; he cured twelve schizophrenic women of catatonia by letting them wear lipstick and giving them a nice room with an oven to make buns in...

As the sixties dawned, Laing qualified as a psychoanalyst and published his seminal work *The Divided Self*. It's a short stick of psychiatric dynamite. Like a post-war Virgil, Laing takes us behind the pebble-dash façade of lower middle-class homes, and shows us a Theatre of Cruelty populated by demons, ghosts and marionettes. He shows us how a family can become a factory for the manufacture of the false self, murdering its children 'with violence masquerading as love' (*The Politics of Experience* p 58).

The following year, Laing set up a private practice in Wimpole Street and started doing acid. Soon he was tripping with the clientèle. LSD seemed to confirm Laing's suspicion that psychosis was a kind of journey, a *process* to be nurtured, not aborted. He was approached by a young actor called Sean Connery who was suffering from stage fright on the eve of his first screen role; a film called *Dr No*. Laing demanded a limo and a bottle of the best single malt scotch for the session, during which he shared with Connery a sample from his vintage stock of clinical-grade Czechoslovakian LSD-25.

In 1964, Laing built his Asylum. Kingsley Hall, a spooky pile in London's east end, became his nursery for nightmares. It was a freaky scene. The line between patient and nurse was obliterated. French communion wine laced with acid. Lunar light through stained glass. A series of theatrical lovies tramped through; Kenneth Tynan, David Mercer - Sean Connery dropped in and played ping-pong with the inmates. Their first patient was Mary Barnes, a large nurse from Portsmouth. On arrival, she promptly regressed to infancy, demanding to be bottle-fed and playing with her own shit. Laing's colleagues mopped her down, rolled another joint and let her get on with it. In time, she worked through her madness, took up painting and hit the lecture circuit.

Laing's reputation grew and he turned into a kind of Shaman. Soon he was hanging out with Ginsberg, Trocchi, the whole freak show. Long hair and cream suits. Lecture tours to the states. It seems that Laing got swept up in the tide of sixties utopianism. In fact, Laing was sixties utopianism. Certainly Timothy Leary was impressed; after Laing's visit to his sixty-room townhouse in New York, he dubbed him 'pontifex', reporting that the two had 'danced stoned high in a sufi ballet'. Laing's devout mother was less keen, believing her Ronnie had 'gone evil'. He later found out she was secretly sticking pins into a toy effigy of her son in the hope of inducing a heart attack.

From the moment of birth, when the Stone Age baby confronts the twentieth-century mother, the baby is subjected to these forces of violence, called love, as its mother and father, and their parents and their parents before them, have been. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities, and on the whole this enterprise is successful. By the time the new human being is 15 or so we are left with a being like ourselves. A half-crazed creature, more or less adjusted to a real world' (Ibid)

As the fruit of the summer of love began to rot on the bough, fragmented groups of hairy radicals looked to Laing to spearhead the 'anti-psychiatry' revolution. Curiously, Laing's life at this point reads like a manic delusion. His face was on every TV. He was the new messiah. And the police were secretly watching him. Sensibly, he ran away. He went to India for a year, and after four weeks of solid meditation in a cave became an initiate of Kali,

Goddess of destruction - possibly a mistake. Laing tuned in, dried out...and dried up. When he came back he found the world had turned and the medical establishment, amongst whom he'd made few friends, was getting ready to punish him. He played the Guru game for a while, but he never repeated the surreal power of *The Politics of Experience*. For the next two decades he sang an increasingly lubricated song for his supper, while book sales dwindled...

At the end of an American lecture tour, he met with fellow psychiatrist Gene Nameche at the Saint Moritz hotel in New York. During a progressively inebriated discussion about a biography of Jung, Laing punched him in the face for talking to his mother, threw a marble coffee table at his head, then lunged a large fragment of the table at the TV declaiming, 'The final act which results in somebody being taken to a mental hospital is the smashing of a television set!'. The missile bounced off, so then they both had a go at smashing it. When it finally exploded, armed security burst into the room. 'I'm seeing a psychiatric patient,' Laing explained. 'This man has a severe history of psychiatric disorder!' They checked his startled colleague's ID. 'See what I mean, his delusion is complete, he's even managed to obtain false identification!' Dr. Nameche was escorted off the premises in handcuffs, and Dr Laing caught the next plane home.

In 1974, Laing was invited to speak at Fatima House, a quiet Christian community in the west of Scotland. The residents were disappointed when Laing failed to appear for dinner on the eve of his talk. Some time after midnight, he banged loudly on the door having thrown up copiously in the cab from Glasgow's West End. With two sons in tow, he staggered in singing

*"Four and twenty virgins came down from Inverness,
And when the ball was over there were four
and twenty less,
Singing, 'Balls to you father, backs against the wall,
If ye canna get fucked on Saturday night ye
canna get fucked at all."*

Laing spotted the crucifix: 'Just the man I want to talk to,' he exclaimed, lasciviously licking Jesus's arse in front of the bleary-eyed devotees. The next morning he gave a coherent and contemplative talk on Sin and Redemption.

One of Laing's many ex-wives said: 'Ronnie wasn't an alcoholic. He was a Glaswegian.' His great thirst never eclipsed his uncanny gifts. He spoke schizophrenia like a native, a Doctor Doolittle amongst shrinks. Sometimes it seemed his mere presence was enough to trigger a process of recovery. During one lecture tour, doctors at a Chicago mental hospital asked his opinion about a schizophrenic girl who wouldn't, or couldn't speak. She sat naked, rocking to and fro in her room. At once, Laing stripped naked, sat down with the girl and began to rock in time with her. She started to talk, for the first time in months. 'Did it never occur to you to do that?' he asked, putting his socks back on.

He was dry and winning by two sets when his Mother's curse descended. As he writhed on the court they told him a doctor was on the way. His last words:

'Doctor? What fucking doctor!?'

Ronnie Laing had been dead a year when he appeared on my screen. He'd agreed to let a Canadian film crew trail him at lectures, at home and in sessions. By this time he'd had his British licence taken away, he'd been busted for cannabis possession, and an American client claimed he'd been persuaded to have his session in the pub. Like an old nightclub crooner, he seemed to be trading on past glories, slurring his way through his old 'numbers'. But, staring through the screen into those hooded eyes, I caught a flash of his sensual, wolfish smile, and a strange thing happened.

All the fear drained out of me.

The clocks stopped, and I heard a voice. A man who wasn't there. It said:

'The most simple things are the most difficult things; getting through a day well is not easy. The most difficult thing in life, I think, is living... I mean really living. A lot of the time I'm in the present and I'm thinking about the past, or scheming about the future instead of... partaking of the sacrament of every present moment.' (*Did you used to be R.D.Laing?* TV 1989)

A sunray crept under my curtain, illuminating a billion motes of dust. School, Ambition, Duty, all the artificial instruments of coercion - time itself - fell away, and the faltering voice let me gently off the hook.

As the credits rolled, I reached for my cigarettes and found an overdue library book at my feet. In gold on the spine, 'Being and Time'. I lit a fag, and picked up a pen. Thanks, Ronnie.

Orlando Harrison AKA The Spirit from Alabama 3



Illustration by Jonny Delafonz

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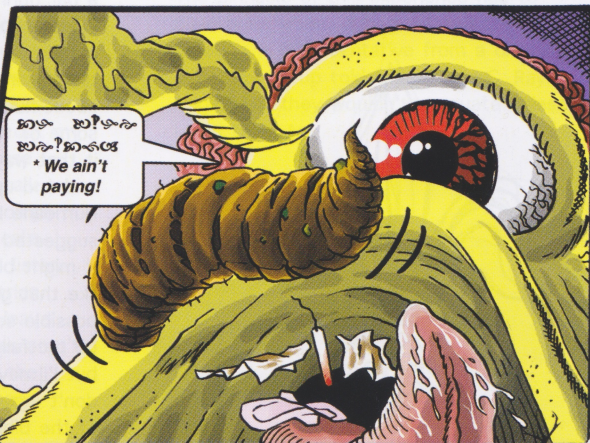
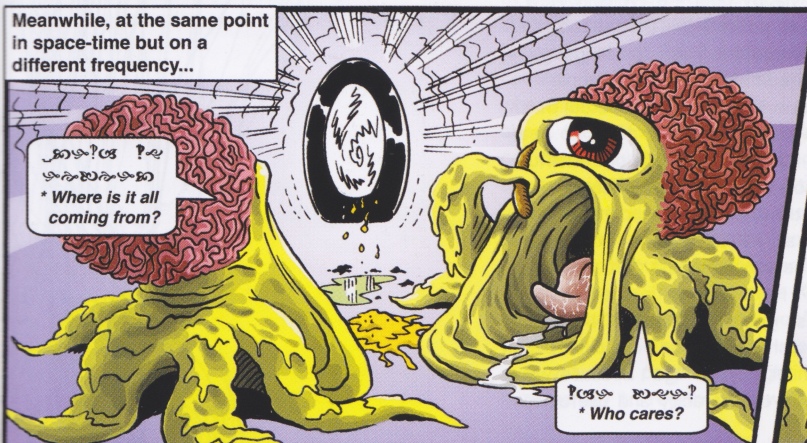
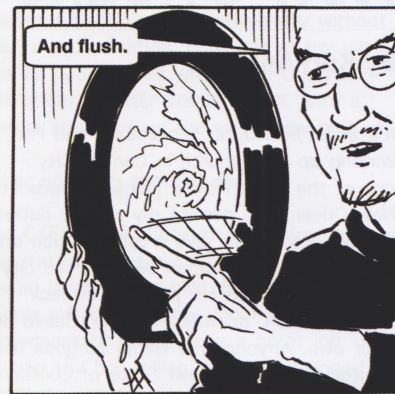
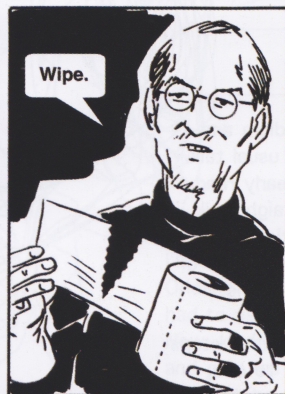
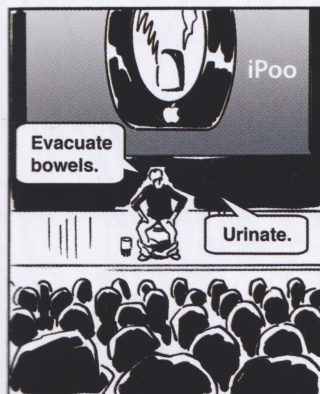
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Big Jobs



A Sinner in the House of the Lord: Evacuation Outreach in Post-Katrina New Orleans

By Kurt Amacker

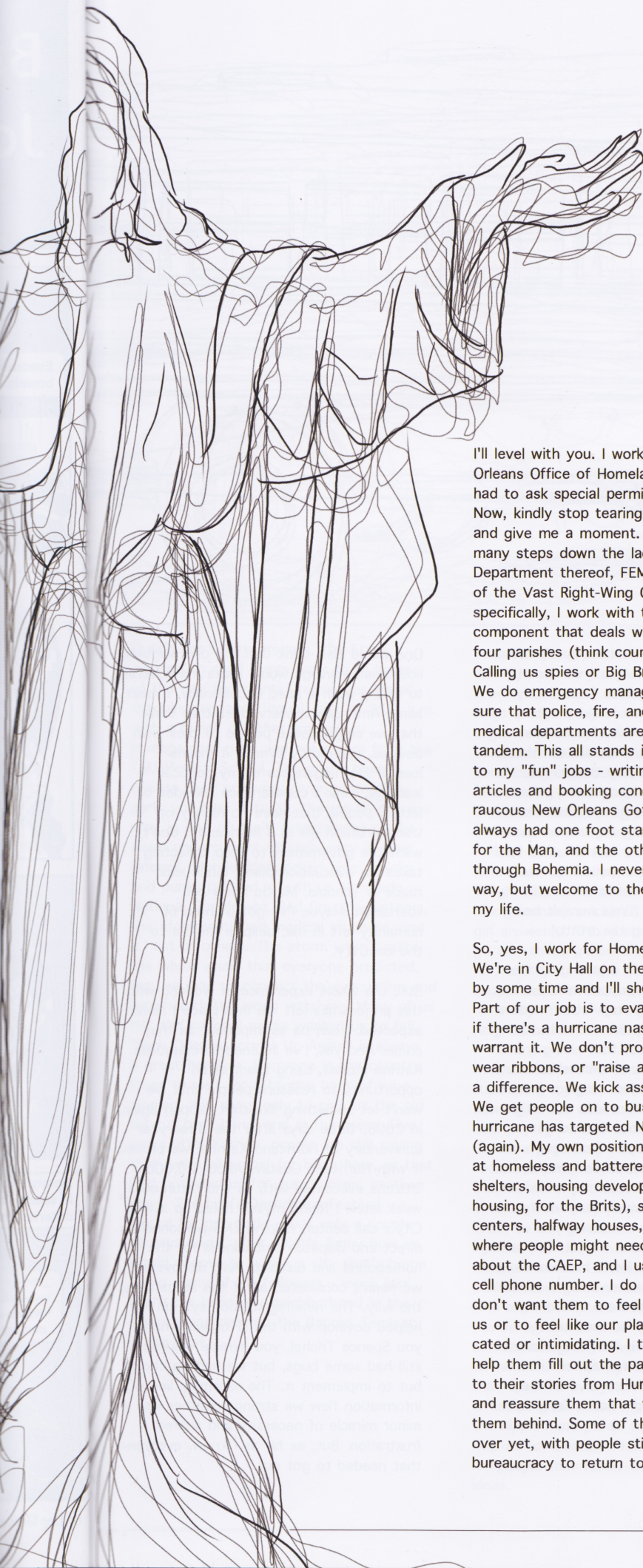
It's a hot Sunday in September, and I'm walking up to a church in Central City - one of the most violent neighborhoods in New Orleans. As part of my regular duties, I've been asked to give a presentation on the hurricane evacuation services the city offers. We do this for people who lack transportation, or otherwise can't leave on their own. Anyone who wants to goes to a shelter run by the great State of Louisiana. As I near the entrance, I can hear the preacher praising Jesus and extolling his flock to avoid the casinos, and to keep their children off the streets. Briefly, I am frightened. I've been to countless small churches with exclusively black congregations. Usually I'm asked to speak at a committee meeting or a Bible study group, but never right after the service. I'm an atheist: I don't do church unless it's to make my mother happy on holidays.

Upon entering, I see the preacher seated at the podium, raising his fist and yelling in a way that would send frightened white Protestants running for the comment cards. I stand in the doorway and resist the urge to yell, "The band! The band! Jesus H. Tap-dancing Christ! I have seen the light!" If you haven't seen *The Blues Brothers*, you should. I meet my point of contact and confirm that I'm to speak after the service, as I thought. Until then, I'm stuck - a heathen-sinner-atheist in the House of the Lord. But, I sweat it out. I stand when they stand and bow my head when they pray. I hold the hands of those on either side of me in a circle. I embrace the woman to my left and offer her God's blessing.

After the service, I take the podium and give a shortened version of my usual talk. The congregants are stirring, clearly ready to leave. I give a mixture of straight talk about the City-Assisted Evacuation Plan (CAEP, for your convenience) with a bit of stand-up comedy for flavor. This time, however, I ditch most of the jokes. I explain that there are designated bus stops around the city. If they make it to one, we'll pick them up in a bus and take them to the train station. There, they'll get on a coach bus and head out of town, or to the airport, to the same effect. They'll go to a shelter and then we'll bring them back. If they have medical problems that keep them from getting to one of those points, we'll pick them up. We'll even take their pets. All the while, I'm invoking the name of God and extolling them go outside and enjoy the day that the Lord has made (let us give thanks and be glad in it). I finish, answer a couple of questions, and shake a few hands - including the pastor, still seated. As I approach him, I see that he has no legs. Rather, his upper half rests in a wheelchair, immaculately clothed in a four-button jacket and tie. My father later tells me that the pastor's lack of legs sounds consistent with a tank injury - as in, being run over by one. I shake his hand and say, "I think you're a lot better at this than I am." He smiles and thanks me. Then, I leave. My red shirt is drenched with sweat. I'm still an atheist. I'm a heathen sinner, freshly emerged from the house of the Lord, having used His name to help save a few lives.

A couple of days later, I was at a meeting of a local secular humanist group. It was in a bar during happy hour - a typically New Orleans sort of gathering. There, I talked about how sometimes I use the language of religion to communicate with people about hurricane evacuation. I insisted that some of the citizens I talk to need to hear it that way, lest they not ride out with us and end up on a roof or dead, like after Hurricane Katrina. One offended humanist suggested that, for the sake of society, it might be better if we just "let people like that go." He meant go in the worst possible sense you're thinking of. I might be tactfully dishonest when I need to be, but I'll never let anyone "go" because we don't agree on the veracity and usefulness of the Bible.





I'll level with you. I work for the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security. I even had to ask special permission to write this. Now, kindly stop tearing out the page and give me a moment. Our office sits many steps down the ladder from the Department thereof, FEMA, and the rest of the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy. More specifically, I work with the regional component that deals with all of the four parishes (think counties) in the area. Calling us spies or Big Brother is laughable. We do emergency management. We make sure that police, fire, and emergency medical departments are all operating in tandem. This all stands in stark contrast to my "fun" jobs - writing comics and articles and booking concerts within the raucous New Orleans Goth scene. I've always had one foot standing at attention for the Man, and the other skipping through Bohemia. I never planned it that way, but welcome to the hell that is my life.

So, yes, I work for Homeland Security. We're in City Hall on the ninth floor. Stop by some time and I'll show you around. Part of our job is to evacuate people if there's a hurricane nasty enough to warrant it. We don't protest, sign petitions, wear ribbons, or "raise awareness" to make a difference. We kick ass and save lives. We get people on to buses when a hurricane has targeted New Orleans (again). My own position entails speaking at homeless and battered women's shelters, housing developments (council housing, for the Brits), senior community centers, halfway houses, and anywhere else where people might need us. I go, I talk about the CAEP, and I usually give out my cell phone number. I do that because I don't want them to feel afraid to talk to us or to feel like our plan is too complicated or intimidating. I take their calls. I help them fill out the paperwork. I listen to their stories from Hurricane Katrina, and reassure them that we won't leave them behind. Some of those stories aren't over yet, with people still fighting the bureaucracy to return to New Orleans.

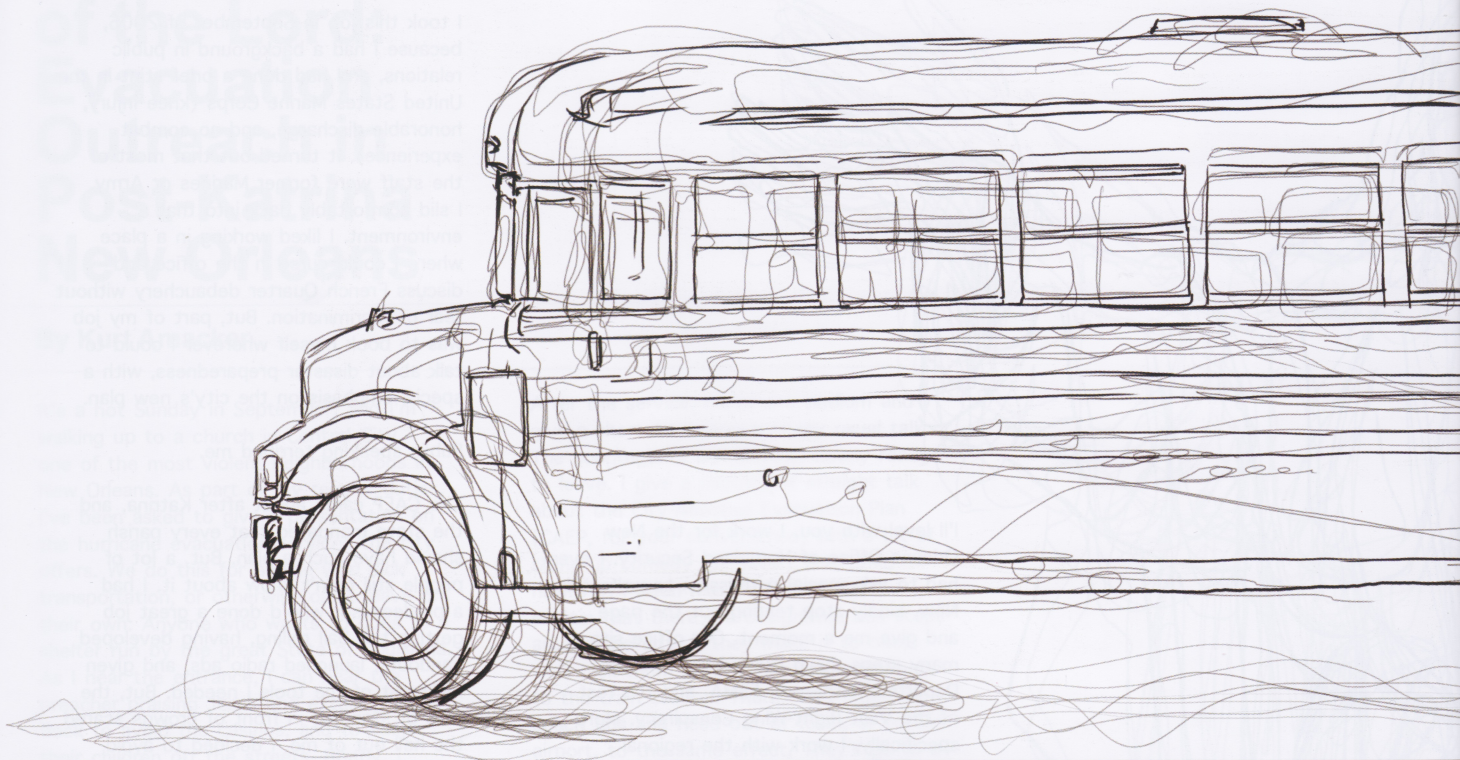
But, we proved it wouldn't happen again in 2008 with Hurricane Gustav, and we'll bloody well do it again if we have to.

I took this job in September of 2006, because I had a background in public relations, and had done a brief stint in the United States Marine Corps (knee injury, honorable discharge, and no combat experience). It turned out that most of the staff were former Marines or Army. I slid comfortably back into that environment. I liked working in a place where I could curse in the office and discuss French Quarter debauchery without fear of recrimination. But, part of my job was to book myself wherever I could to talk about disaster preparedness, with a special emphasis on the city's new plan.

Public speaking terrified me.

The CAEP came about after Katrina, and the state mandated that every parish should have such a plan. But, a lot of people still didn't know about it. I had a predecessor who'd done a great job getting the ball rolling, having developed handouts, launched radio ads, and given me most of the tools I needed. But, the idea of standing in front of crowds scared the hell out of me. I decided to avoid redundancy and contacted the Red Cross, who already gave disaster preparedness talks. I offered to tag along and chat up the CAEP. So off I went, again and again, with any one of their representatives. And holy hell, was I awful.

It's hard to engage people when you can't stop staring at the ground, or speaking rapidly in between gasps for air - much less with crowds hostile to any form of government after Katrina. But, I wanted to stay gainfully employed, so I fought through it. Eventually, I got better. To lighten the mood, I started throwing in (censored, yet hilarious) tales of New Orleans Bohemian excess. I'd encourage them to go ahead and call me whenever they wanted, but that on Saturday night I might not be sober or polite. I'd mention the time one woman called me late when I was naked with one foot in the bathtub - and how I helped her anyway. Not to pat myself on the back, but when I get on a roll, the laughter gets so loud that I can't continue my talk until the room has quieted down. I'm nothing if not modest. The pinnacle of this experience had to have been when, during a City Council meeting, a representative from a disability advocacy group told then-Mayor C. Ray Nagin that they wouldn't evacuate unless I told them to.



I've come to realize something that few American liberals seem to get - that the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and the generally downtrodden hate pity. I promised myself that I wouldn't talk down to anyone, and that I wouldn't lie about what we are able to do. I swore not to make unrealistic promises. I simply told - and tell - people that I'll be honest with them, for good or ill. Doing otherwise means I risk alienating someone. In a certain sequence of events, that could end with a person refusing our help and dying in another storm.

I level with everyone I talk to. It's a frank, funny tone that I can tell they don't hear very often from a City representative. The kids call it "attitude", I guess. I say that they will ride a bus for several hours; that they will stay at a shelter; and that there, they may have to eat terrible food and sleep on the floor to free up cots for the neediest (elderly, pregnant, disabled). "It's an evacuation, not a vacation," I like to say. But, I remind them that they will survive. The shelter will stay open as long as necessary, and then they will return to New Orleans when all's clear. There are no conspiratorial backroom deals afoot to change the voting demographics in New Orleans. Home is home and everyone comes back. I may sound like a prick at times, but people in need prefer honesty over false promises and hand-holding. Oddly enough, the people who will likely need our services are the most grateful and least hostile. In more bourgeois neighborhood association meetings, people who will never need our help are much more demanding and accusatory - on principle, I assume.

My candor goes over better than you'd think - though not always. I was nearly chased out of a church in Central City by an angry mob when I told them we couldn't meet a long list of demands they'd presented me with. We call those "unfunded mandates", by the way. It usually comes as an idea from a citizen or group that thinks the government should do XYZ, without having any notion as to how to pay for it. But, as I left that lone angry church, a woman pulled up next to me with her window rolled down. She leaned out and said, "You weren't being rude. You were telling the truth."

This job has put me in a strange place. I was raised in a white, upper-middle class military family, though my father made a point to send us to public schools. He believed (and believes) that hiding from other people because of their skin color, socioeconomic status, or religious beliefs doesn't help anyone. I'm also not religious, but I have to talk about God to get through to some people. That seems at odds with my promise to be truthful, but I'm not on the road to sell my world view. I don't think we should let anyone "go" just because they're immersed in a religious experience that they'll likely never leave. I'm an atheist. I'm a heathen sinner in the house of the Lord, doing work He'd probably be proud of. I am united with everyone I talk to by our common humanity and our love for New Orleans. That's a good reason for diplomatic dishonesty if I ever heard of one. But, again, I'm selling help - not looking for votes.

One would also think that my own vaguely libertarian leanings would make me adverse to selling such a plan. Occasionally, I meet some American conservatives that think that we should leave people to their own devices, apparently even if it means loss of life. Regardless of my political leanings, I can't countenance the idea of letting people that have no money or transportation die in a hurricane. I don't want the government to stop collecting taxes for evacuation plans, much less roads or schools. Maybe I'm a bad libertarian. Maybe I've got a shred of humanity left in me, despite rumors to the contrary.

Still, the whole experience of working with this project has left me in a place I never expected. I can be as impatient as they come. And yet, I've listened to countless Katrina stories, using them as an opportunity to reassure people that we won't let something like that happen again. In 2008, three days after the three-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, we proved it with Hurricane Gustav. About 20,000 citizens evacuated with us and returned a week later. I found myself holed up in the City's call center, helping EMS personnel to direct and dispatch ambulances for the homebound and disabled. As I discovered, we hadn't considered all of the steps along the way. The new registration system I'd helped develop with the IT crowd (thank you Spence Trichel, you miracle worker) still had some bugs, but we had no choice but to implement it. The assembly line of information flow we strung together was a minor miracle of necessity and shared frustration. But, as far as I know, everyone that needed to get out.



During the return process, the State decided to send buses back at all hours of the day and night. I remember literally dragging luggage through piss at 2:00 a.m. with a bunch of other emergency management guys and volunteers from the LSU Medical School. The coach buses release their unsavory cargo when they park, you see. Actually, the return process was, in and of itself, a testament to the weird undercurrent of civic unity in New Orleans. Blonde-dreadlocked hippy-chicks and punks pitched in with us alongside National Guardsmen, Red Cross volunteers, the aforementioned medical students, and a host of others. The storm wasn't quite the white whale that everyone predicted. But, we had to conduct the evacuation and return with the world watching. Many of us felt the national media wanted us to fail. "New Orleans Screws Up Again" is always a great headline. Everyone in the country loves to visit for a tawdry bout of wine, women, and song, only to give us the old tut-tut back home and in the press. Five years after Katrina, people are still saying that we're all stupid for living here, or that God punished us for our drunken, heathen ways. The city's Decadence Festival - a Mecca for gay pride - was only a couple of days away, after all. It's funny how He would choose to wreck a city that's home to so many of His followers - much less spare the main gay neighborhood in the Marigny and destroy the Baptist Seminary in the East.

I started doing outreach work because it was part of my job. But, I've learned quite a bit from it. The sound of soft bigotry rings loudly in my ears now. I was lecturing a group of newly arrived Catholic youth volunteers about our plan, and about conducting outreach in an area with such devastating poverty. One of them asked if the former rectory they were living in was in a "bad neighborhood." I responded, "What? Does it have black people?" My Red Cross counterpart, Jacqueline (a delightful and somehow eternally youthful black woman) snickered behind me. The girl answered, "No, just the bad ones." I go into those places all the time for my job, and talk to "the bad ones". Fear should never overcome our common humanity. That's what makes "bad neighborhoods" in the first place.

I won't claim to be some kind of hero. Just doing my job, ma'am. Nothing to see here. But, I've encountered enough people who pay lip service to the kind of thing I do for a paycheck. Petition signed and Facebook profile updated? Great job. But, they've never sat with a mentally disabled veteran who really just wants someone to listen to him go on for a bit about his injuries. I've done it. I don't mind. But, I know American liberals who are more concerned about animals than people, and who are more interested in making sure you've agreed to their talking points than actually doing anything. Failing to agree is tantamount to heresy. By no means does that describe everyone that embraces leftist politics. Recall my example about the hippies and punks that showed up to help us for Gustav. I have a lot of respect for people that follow through on their ideas.

But for many others, rhetoric is more important than action. Failing to meet all criteria ensures a permanent black mark in the great Book of Bohemia, stored in underground cafes around the nation. It's not any better with the conservatives, but you knew that. Giving Barack Obama credit for tying his shoes properly means you're a pinko-commie-liberal-socialist-whatever. I love tea, but I won't be at your party.

We're eager to see what divides us rather than what unites us. We're more interested in making sure we appear more clever or righteous than the other side, rather than just helping those in need. Our politics are mostly to destroy the opposition, often while neglecting those with very basic needs. I know that we all have different ideas, but we have to share the same planet. My work for Homeland Security has repeatedly thrust me into situations I likely never would've gone into on my own. It's meant I've had to connect with and earn the trust of people on the edges of society, who are used to being overlooked. Regardless of my religious beliefs (or lack thereof) or difference in voting record or musical taste, our shared humanity matters more. I have no desire to see anyone stuck on a roof or dead in their attic. I won't let anyone "go" because of our differences. Call me whatever you like for that, or for my use of religious rhetoric when needed, for my unwillingness to sugarcoat what we offer, or for my insistence on doing this job my way. I'm still here.

Turn this thing off, it's confusing me.

By Robin Ince

An ape with self-consciousness is a ridiculous idea. What could have come up with such a thing?

There the problem lies. Nothing came up with it.

It relied on replication, mutation and natural selection; a frankly shoddy idea. This is not a manufacturing process that can be relied on, as you may have already observed in your infuriating life.

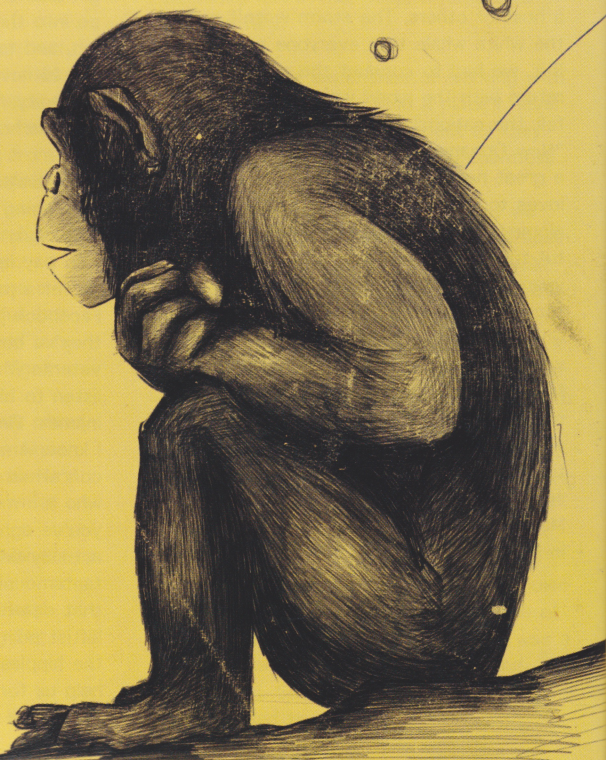
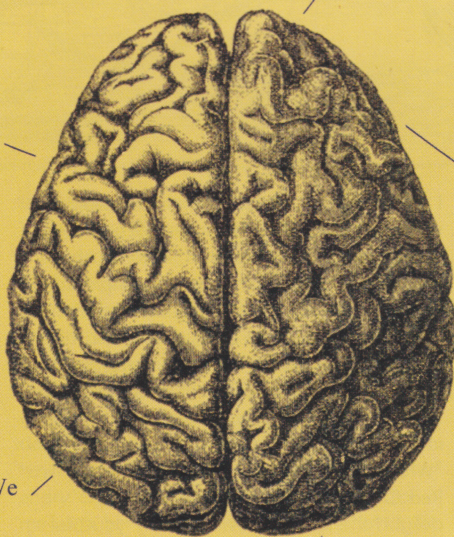
Many people have decided to refute the idea of evolution preferring to think the self-consciousness oddity and everything else was created by something all-powerful and all-knowing. It is surely a mind with malevolent intent that would come up with the idea of being aware of yourself and your death. The only reason they came up with the deity hypothesis in the first place was because of that darned self-consciousness. Mindful of our own mortality, we refuse to believe that eventually we just stop being conscious and so stop existing. We are finite. Bullfrogs, chaffinches and Glis glis don't need gods and explanations because they just dart around with their hard-wired survival instincts unaware of themselves as selves and unaware that one well-cleaned window around the corner can lead to a brain-smashed death (that's predominantly for the chaffinch obviously. I have no idea if a bullfrog or Glis glis is likely to confuse glass for just another patch of thin air and propel itself into it with such gusto it would break its brain).

So it shouldn't be surprising that after these billions of years of evolution, years that have led to humans being the only known creature in the universe to comprehend that they are in a universe and to have the wherewithal or misfortune to ponder on why and what the cosmos is, many people declare, "Oh, I just want to switch off".

By switch off they do not mean a journey to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland to end their life: that's the last stop in the unbearableness of being. This switch off is to immerse yourself in glossiness, emptiness and trash; to enjoy the thoughtless. Even to enjoy the thoughtless might be too much, perhaps it is to be joyless but also without any other emotion hampering you. Where once we were told that humans retreat into busyness to avoid thought, now we hide inside trashiness.

The human brain is the most complex thing in the known universe, which can only strengthen our hope that some other living thing is out there. Though if there is something else out there, as Rod Serling and 2000AD have warned us, it might put us in a zoo or have us for lunch.

I spend much of my life on trains. I like trains, I see them as a 'bring your own' library and pondering shuttle. Three hours of sitting and reading while sipping tea, occasionally looking out of the window to be impressed by a lonely church or hectic scrapyard. On my journey from Exeter to Leeds (my tour booker does not have a great grasp of geography), a bespectacled woman sat opposite me and took out her copy of *Closer* magazine. An adult *Bunty*, it is filled with wizard japes about women who wed psychopaths, lose an eye and learn to live again, and soap actors who hide a secret sadness. After two hours of traveling, somewhere near Wolverhampton the woman put down her half-read magazine, removed her glasses and rubbed her eyes saying, "I need to give my brain a break". I think I failed to conceal my wince. Even a magazine that had surely been created to 'switch off' from the day's hubbub and pesky thoughts has become something to switch off from. When even the switch off needs to be switched off it seems we are in trouble.



A crab may not have self-consciousness, but equally it never looks at its reflection in a rock pool and thinks, "Oh no, my claws look really dowdy, I better get some glitter spray and a shitty thong". The trouble with self-consciousness is that it makes you so self-conscious.

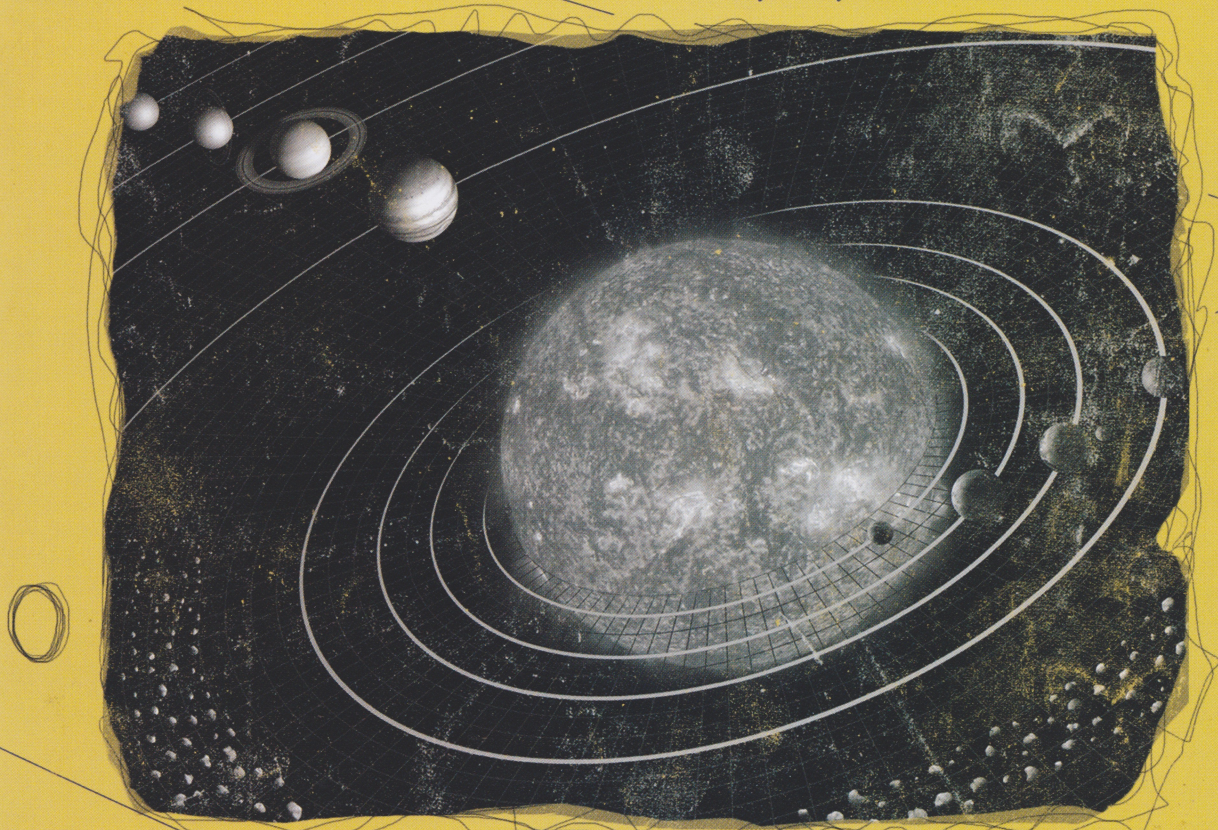
When a supermodel such as Elle Macpherson tells her public that she might not like what she sees in the mirror or that some of her features are gnarled and twisted in her eyes, the people scoff or throw scorn upon the woman. She must be pretending she is unaware of how very beautiful she is while secretly laughing at the true uglies such as you and me. But that is the wonder of self-consciousness, the majority can only see their imperfections save for the few occasions they might be so drunk as to think they are attractive or as interesting as everyone else. I still can't listen to my own recorded voice, making editing radio programmes a tricky business. I am not a child though: it is not the horror of hearing my voice - I am used to that garbled man-child mumble - it is now what it says that annoys me.

"Oh dear, what will this smartly dressed professional scientist think if I don't kill this man upon his instruction?"

So should we all say to hell with self-consciousness and self-lobotomise with our trepanning tools?

Weighing it all up I think: now I've got it I'd rather not lose it - even though I know one day I will. And after all those years of worrying about the day it goes, afterwards I won't feel a thing.

Rather than switch it off, I think I am going to try and make sure it stays on. Even if the inner monologue that does come with it can be a little grating and psychotic, at least it sometimes impersonates the voice of Herbert Lom or Carl Sagan. Now I'd better get down to understanding the triune brain that might suggest that some of my decisions come about from my inner Velociraptor bickering with my inner ground sloth. I certainly wouldn't have punched that computer monitor hard in the screen if the ground sloth had its way, bloody dinosaur brain.



That is why 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' is such a belligerent instruction. This would require most people to look at the man at number 17 with derision and sneer at their failure to become what he had dreamed of in his youth.

Self-consciousness is the brake that makes us mute and talk too much polite conversation. Have you ever wanted to break into a brief dance move while browsing in a bookshop? Have you ever wanted to start a discussion about cannibalism at a polite drinks evening? Have you ever wanted to stare a bureaucrat uncomprehendingly in their face as they tell you that you cannot do what you'd like to do, then plant a kiss on their forehead, smile and depart?

But you haven't because you thought: "But what will they think of me? I might get a reputation and find myself only able to wander the backstreets after midnight, hooded and surreptitious". There's a reason Stanley Milgram got 65 per cent of people to apparently administer lethal electric shocks to an unknown man who had merely failed to correctly answer a few questions.

NOTE: this whole piece is a warning to avoid reading philosophy. It might not bring you joy realizing that you know nothing. Even if it brings the strange pride and superiority for knowing that you know nothing while the others, the more confident ones, stupidly believe they do know something. Perhaps it is best to live like the consciousness-despiser Schopenhauer, without people but with a poodle or two to comb. And even if he did find life defined by pain more than joy, he still went on with it, so we might as well, poodle or no poodle.

NOTE UNDER A NOTE: while we're on the problems of existence, someone furiously unfollowed me on Twitter this month. My crime? I had given away that Godot does not appear in *Waiting for Godot*. "I am going to see this in January. You have ruined it. Consider yourself unfollowed". Sorry to anyone who has only just found out from this that Godot doesn't appear in *Godot*, but if it spoils *Waiting for Godot* for you, then I don't really think it was your sort of play.



THE WORLD OF “ILL”UZION

BY LEJORNE PINDLING

It is, isn't it? A world of confusion, concealment and deception, a place where even sometimes what the eye sees, and what the ears hear, is not a certainty. There are far too many people in the world for me to say this is fact (although I'm sure it can't be denied) but everyone in their life at some stage has found themselves veiled from the truth and, through no fault of our own (or the media, because they would never be ones to give questionable information), sometimes it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is reality and what is fiction.

This is certainly something which currently applies to what is one of the most saturated industries in the UK at the moment, the football business.

In all honesty, it sickens me to see the amount of money that is pumped into the top level of this game and made available for these “athletes”. It will become a more shocking reality soon, as the business continues to approve excessive transfers (despite the country being in the current economic climate it is), endless ticket price hikes, and under-performing prima donna players who live extravagant and controversial lives.

Wayne Rooney (and I hate to single him out because this applies across the board throughout the premiership) has been a big part of my reality recently, as a United fan (no, not Newcastle), although I can't quite get a grasp on what he thinks is reality. I mean, as if it isn't bad enough to fornicate with someone so many years his senior (OK, so she was allegedly only 52), in what reality can he and the directors at United think that he deserves or even warrants making what is reported to be (by, hey, guess who...? The media) £200,000 a week?

Firstly, for all of those that don't watch football, I still can't imagine that you wouldn't know who Manchester United (the biggest club in the world, with the most experienced and successful manager of some of the world's best players) are. It's alleged they currently have amassed more than £750million of debt, (which as far as I am concerned is a fictional

figure of money which simply doesn't exist... but, hey, that's just my reality). Then they are held to ransom by their supposedly best and (at the time) most loved player, until they agree to raise his contract from approximately £100,000 to now more than double that. Now, before people start saying, “Well, Wayne Rooney's a great player, blah blah blah...” let me just clear something up. The mission for a football team is to score goals against the opposition. Wayne is instrumental on this mission, as he is United's (and England's) “talismanic” striker whose prime role is to put the ball in the back of the net.

Since March this year, good ol' £200,000-a-week Wayne hasn't put the ball in the back of a net except for a penalty for England, and hasn't scored at all for United. I'm sure the majority of people were privileged (or down right incensed) to see him “perform” for his country at this year's World Cup, where he was dismal. (No, that word doesn't really fit. Abominable? Hmm, maybe a mixture of the two - disimable?). Throw in a drunken night snapped on the front of the Sun urinating up the side of a wall (typical) and yet another affair, albeit with someone who wasn't old enough to be his Grandma, and you have the all-deserving Wayne Rooney.

If I wasn't doing my job properly, I'd soon find myself out on my ear (and certainly not getting a pay rise) and this seems to be a funny thing with these footballers, that they are rewarded for questionable behaviour and poor results. On the one hand you have everyday “working class” people who are being told our country is massively in debt and that we need to “pull together” and combat this deficit, and then on the other hand you have greedy undeserving footballers who are not happy receiving £100,000 a week. Really the government should be asking the FA to assess whether or not, in the financial climate we currently live in, it is acceptable for men who play “games” to be paid these sums of money.

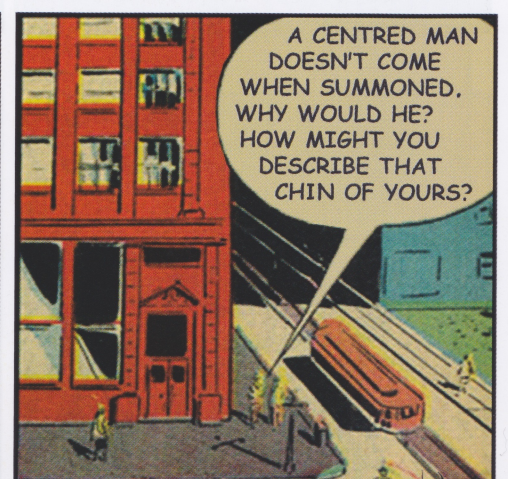
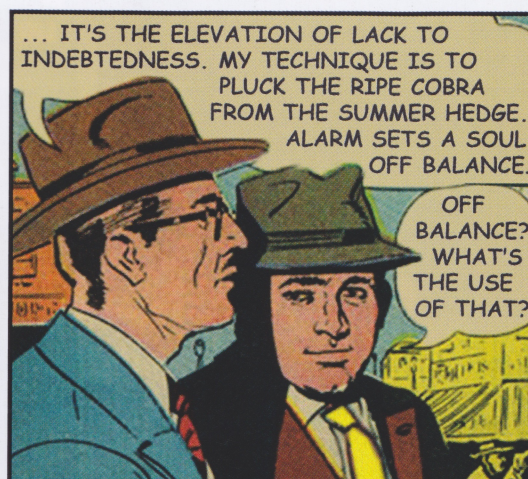
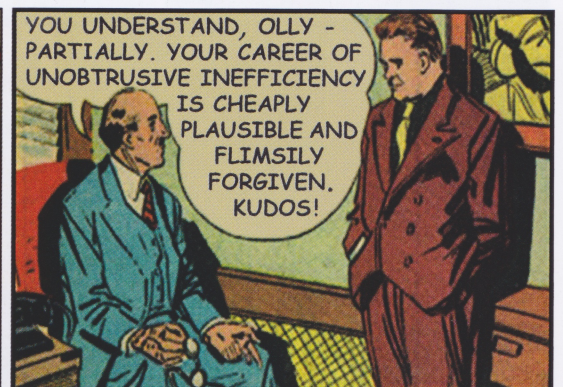
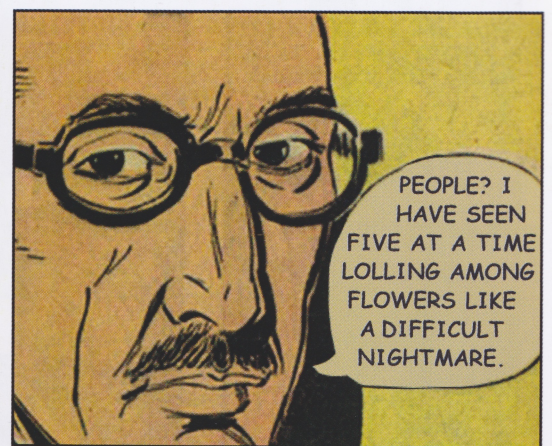
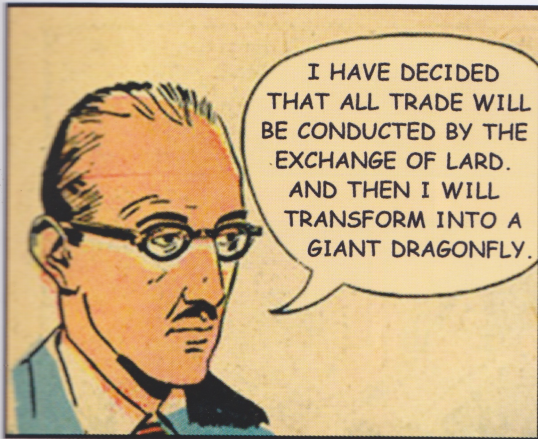
From a fan's perspective, I would be lucky to see £100,000 in four years, let alone in a week, and this is where football players (I think) lose grip on reality. I, among many of the other fans that support these teams and pay the fees to watch these players, feel let down by the way they conduct themselves. Ask yourself, what would Wayne Rooney be doing if he couldn't play football? (Although whether he has been playing good football is debatable since March). Sort it out, Wayne!

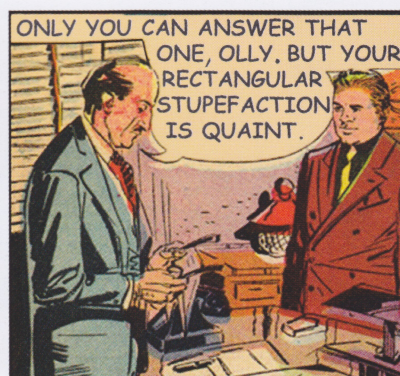
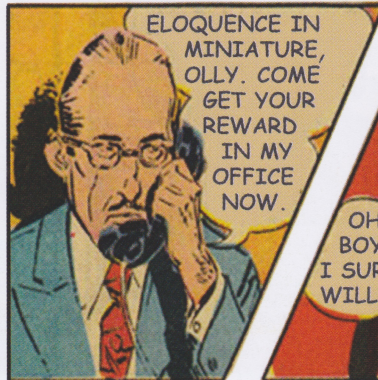
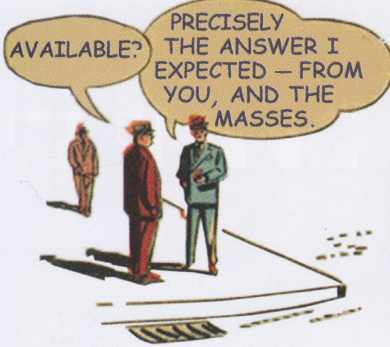
Just as a side note, imagine how confused I was when I walked into Morrisons on the 2nd October and saw that they were selling mince pies! I did a double take – and Mariah Carey's “All I Want For Christmas” confirmed that Morrisons had definitely received their Xmas deliveries a month early. I mean, unless my calendar was wrong (or the likely fact that I had spent a whole month hibernating) we still had the joys of Halloween and Bonfire night to go...? What is it with Christmas starting earlier and earlier every year? We may as well start celebrating Christmas in July as it is becoming that way.

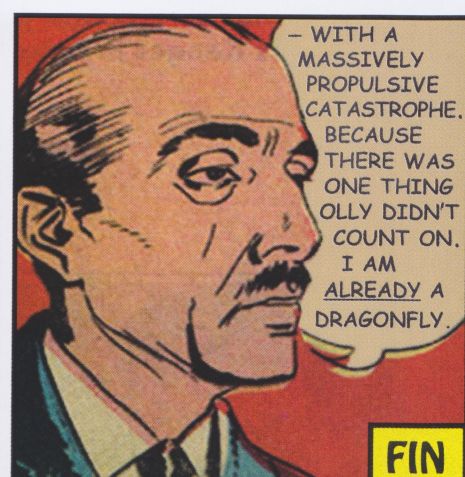
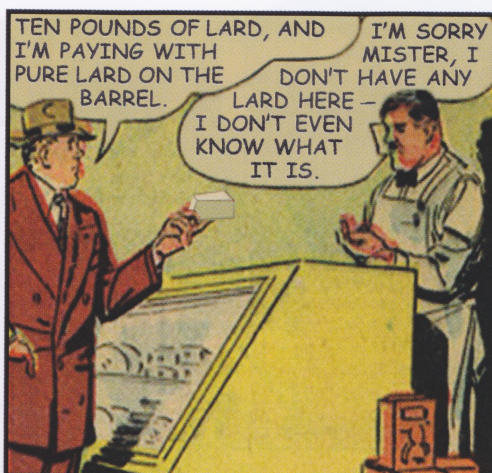
Cue Armageddon in Tesco's for the last turkey!

Happy Xmas

MAYOR NIMBLE MAKES IT KNOWN STEVE AYLETT







FIN

MAKING THE CASE FOR THE SUPER MOBY DICK OF SPACE

BY STEWART LEE

Next time you read a thoughtful article in a broadsheet newspaper about how 'graphic novels' are now serious literature, take a look at the American comic books of the fifties and sixties and remind yourself how far we, as a civilization, have come. Pitiful four-colour daubs picture infantile, underwear-clad simpletons, barely capable of reasoned thought, in battle with absurd aliens, deranged versions of their future selves, and cackling pantomime villains. It seemed as if these comics were written solely for the amusement of children, and it's impossible to imagine that within a few decades comics would have evolved to offer us the sophisticated geo-political travelogues of Joe Sacco (*Safe Area Gorazde*, *Palestine*, *Walking With Israelis*) the brutal scatological and religious satires of Garth Ennis (*Preacher*, *The Boys*, *God's Cunts*) and the erotic mysticism of Alan Moore (*Promethea*, *Lost Girls*, *Perfumed Emissions*). But they did. How?

The *Super Moby Dick of Space*, actually a cumbersome astro-fish and not a cetacean at all, appeared only once in the comics universe, in a May 1965 edition of DC's *Adventure Comics Featuring Superboy and The Legion Of Super-heroes* (issue 332), and was clearly written in the not insignificant

shadow of Herman Melville's definitive American novel, *Moby Dick*. In *The Super Moby Dick Of Space*, a small fish is accidentally enlarged by one Dr Lampier, whereupon it flies into space to feast indiscriminately on metal ores. After *The Super Moby Dick of Space* gobbles up a space freighter, Lightning Lad battles it unsuccessfully, his injuries resulting in the amputation of his right arm. Dr Lampier gives Lightning Lad a new metal arm. ("This should give me the power to handle the *Super Moby Dick*", the Lad says.) Then, like some kind of mad one-armed Captain Ahab in green tights, Lightning Lad vows secretly to destroy the *Dick* and leads the unwitting Legion Of Superheroes in its pursuit. A psychedelic, venom-induced vision stops the blood-crazed Lightning Lad slaying the *Space Dick* and eventually the innocent fish is shrunk back to its normal size.

From this précis, *The Super Moby Dick of Space* seems a typical example of the kind of accidentally surreal comic book landfill of the era (1). But it is more than that. So much more. For *The Super Moby Dick of Space* is perhaps a key, if rarely acknowledged, element in the process by which comics have evolved from the pathetic scribbles of the post-war era, once consumed, as explained earlier, only by infants and those with poor reading skills, to the sophisticated graphic literature of today, stocked in best bookshops, and discussed in broadsheet newspapers, usually under the heading 'Comics Have Grown Up!'

And the seismic tremors that *The Super Moby Dick of Space's* writer Edmond Hamilton set in motion, when he first mixed the highbrow world of literature, in the form of his own fantastic re-imagining of Herman Melville's enormous sea-dwelling metaphor for human hubris, with the clanking world of dimbo comic book

idiocy, are still being felt today. However simplistic its depiction, Lightning Lad's obsessive, one-armed quest for the *Dick* chimed with the same philosophical truisms that Melville coaxed from Ahab's obsession. How many of Hamilton's previously passive readers must suddenly have felt themselves stirred by thoughts of the *Super Dick* into a quiet contemplation of what it meant to be human? Hamilton's *The Super Moby Dick Of Space* began the process of saving comics from themselves. Hamilton taught the genre ambition. He taught the comics scribes of the future to chase their own white whales. But who was he?

Born in 1904, Hamilton's golden era was the twenties and thirties when he wrote, prolifically, for Farnsworth Wright's seminal *Weird Tales* magazine, alongside other favourites like HP Lovecraft, Jack Williamson and Robert E Howard. By the forties, as Science Fiction became more sophisticated, Hamilton's Flash Gordon-style space operas seemed dated, and in 1946 he began a twenty year stint penning stories for DC comics, then as now a publisher known for its charitable acceptance of once ambitious writers who had failed in more highbrow areas of literature. But lest we should dismiss Hamilton as a hack, and the genius of *The Super Moby Dick Of Space* as a mere fluke, bear in mind these three key points in his defence.

- 1) After a few years writing the adventures of Lightning Lad, Captain Future and such like, Hamilton's own prose work was, according to sci-fi experts, showing increasing signs of sophistication, culminating in 1960's philosophically inclined novel, *The Haunted Stars*, still highly regarded today.
- 2) Like many male comic book writers, Hamilton was romantically entwined with a more talented female partner, whom one must assume had influenced his work. In 1946, Hamilton married the acclaimed, snow-obsessed, science fiction

FOOTNOTES

(1) To be fair, there are other moments of incidental brilliance in the story, such as 'The World Of Dead Robots' that Lightning Lad briefly flies over in his spaceship. "Those huge mechanical giants, created to serve humans, revolted and drove their masters away. Then, unable to repair themselves, they gradually stopped running and 'died'," the lad observes of the rotting robots, depicted by the artist John Forte as resembling the denizens of some now abandoned Soviet-era sculpture park.





author Leigh Brackett, eventually to become the screenwriter for *The Empire Strikes Back*, conspicuously the only one of the original *Star Wars* trilogy in which the dialogue is anything more than just the phrase "I've got a bad feeling about this" repeated over and over again. Stan Lee says it was his wife that urged him to give his crazy Spider-man and Fantastic Four ideas a shot. It's a reasonable presumption that Brackett's encouragement might have given Hamilton the confidence to act on his ambitious *The Super Moby Dick Of Space* vision, despite the apparent restrictions of the comics genre.

3) In his essay *Herman Melville: Space Opera Virtuoso*, the Nebula award-winning Science Fiction writer John Kessel describes how the young, would-be pulp magazine contributor Herman Melville corresponded with contemporaries like Fritz Leiber, Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester and Edmond Hamilton. Edmond Hamilton! Stumbling across this essay on the internet, everything suddenly made sense. Perhaps Hamilton and Melville had cooked up *Moby Dick* together, Melville using the idea as the basis for the great American novel, Hamilton using it as the basis for the comic book that changed everything. Except of course the dates don't work. *Moby Dick* was published in 1851, Melville died before Hamilton was born, and on closer inspection Kessel's piece is a delightful alternate history fantasy in which Melville invents modern science fiction in 1920s New York with his novel *The Wail*. Kessel posits this Melville's Ahab as the captain of the Independent Research Ship Peascod, and he is able, "through alien symbiosis, to detect the forces that move behind the 'pasteboard mask' of matter."

But behind the pasteboard mask of Kessel's temporarily misleading fiction, behind the fact that Melville and Hamilton did not know each other at all, and could not have done, lies a strange coincidence, which suggests Hamilton was the natural inheritor of Melville's visionary innovations, whether he knew it or not. When Melville wrote *Moby Dick*, the sea was the unknown, the limit of

man's understanding of the physical world, the perfect location upon which to float the gigantic symbol that is the unknowable white whale. For Hamilton's generation it was space. But maybe Melville saw this shift of focus coming, a shift eventually accelerated by Lightning Lad's grapple with a Dick of his own.

Melville's last novel was 1857's *The Confidence-Man*. His prose was largely unappreciated during his lifetime and he lived out the rest of his days as a customs officer, and occasional poet, dying uncelebrated in 1891. But Melville's notebooks show that he was still at work on unfinished ideas, and that he was also a great reader of contemporary writers. An 1866 journal shows Melville clearly spellbound by Jules Verne's recently published *From The Earth To The Moon*, making notes comparing the sea to space itself, the frustrated and forgotten writer envisioning 'dark waves of black air', 'a white surf of starlight', and 'a voyage to the unknown suns, destined to remain unending'. And, perhaps aware of Francis Godwin's 1599 proto-sci-fi fantasy, *The Man in the Moone*, or a *Discourse of a Voyage thither*, in which basket-harnessed geese carry a passenger into space, Melville had begun to make some very strange sketches: - pencil drawings of a whale, borne to the stars by vast flocks of birds tied to its fins, its jaws snapping at manned, pencil-shaped cylinders. But why? What was Melville trying to say? Was this space-borne Dick an attempt to extend the metaphor of the white whale in a medium Melville knew would soon be universally appropriate? And was this an attempt

that Edmond Hamilton eventually and intuitively completed, one hundred years later? Melville's *Moby Dick* gave the Great American Novel vast and unprecedented depths. Hamilton's *The Super Moby Dick Of Space* began the same process for the Great American Comic Book. Neither writer was given any credit for what he had done in his lifetime.

During his second and final attempt to slay the Super Dick, Lightning Lad is pictured in a wild-eyed visionary state, Dick venom from the wound that severed his arm finally having made its way through his bloodstream to his brain. He pictures the Dick at the centre of a vast cosmos of interrelated beings, and realises that his intended vengeance is an offence to nature. "Everything that lives is holy," he observes, trembling, "Energy is eternal delight." With these words, quoted presumably deliberately by Hamilton from William Blake's *The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell*, Hamilton not only assimilates the lessons of Melville's *Moby Dick*, but arguably improves upon them, plugging the novel into a wider consciousness of ecstatic moral relativism that Melville only hinted at. And, on a perhaps less profound note, he showed those who were watching - Alan Moore included, I should imagine - just what comics might one day be capable of.

WE ARE RUBBER, YOU ARE GLUE

Welcome, young reader, to our very first Dodgem Logic letters page. I'm Miss Enid Truckleton and I used to be the letters-editor on girls' picture-weekly BUNTY, before it merged with its sister-paper to become BUNTY & SKANK and I retired with nerves. They've asked me to have a good old sort-through the post-bag, weed out those that aren't really suitable for a girls' picture-weekly, such as envelopes that have explosives in or in one case what I believe might have been semen, and then answer any questions about periods or blackheads that our audience have sent us. So, without further ado, let's get stuck in and see what's on the mind of today's modern miss!

What do you think the first reader's question of the first Dodgem Logic letters page should be?

Gav Cross,
Liverpool

Oh dear. I imagine this is that terribly up-to-date humour like Terry & June that I don't really get. All I can say, Gavina, is that in my view girls who try to be funny will have little success in attracting young men. You'd do better if you were to cultivate an interest in sporting contests, motor vehicles or, at a pinch, hand relief. If you simply **have** to ask a question, I'd advise that you restrict yourself to recipes or grooming tips.

Hi, I was wondering if the man behind the curtain himself could hand out some wisdom on personal grooming; I am speaking, of course, about beard management. I have been a proud bearer of a wealth of facial hair for sometime now, but am often frustrated by its lack of cooperation and my lack of competence, leaving me with a frayed, curly, angry mess. Who better to ask for some tips than he who has the most immaculate of beards?

Thank you kindly,
Adam Cook
Vancouver, Canada

Now, this is much more like it! And how telling that our first sensible question should have come not from this country, but from Miss Ada M. Cook in far-off Canada! Firstly, Ada, let me say that while I receive many questions about facial hair, yours is by far the bravest and the most robust approach to this delicate topic that I can remember hearing. You are an exceptionally courageous young woman. As to the specific subject of your enquiry, I have known the man in question since my interview at 11 o'clock this morning and can confirm that he is apparently a stranger to the concept of grooming. I fear the effect which you so much admire is simply what will happen to a human head if it's left unattended. My advice is that you learn to love your own 'frayed, curly, angry mess', which I think actually sounds jolly dashing, and keep on providing your heroic, bold example to the less self-confident girls in your circle. Of course, you will never marry, but that isn't the end of the world and there is always work to be had in the circus. So, chin up...and I hope that doesn't sound tactless.

Greetings.

Now, I don't live in Northampton. From what I hear it is a terrifying and interesting city, with a good deal of culture. Your magazine has given me a somewhat wider perspective on the city that you find yourselves located. I thank you for this. But I wonder why it is that you have yet to mention a recent popular artist that hails from Northampton. His name is James Chapman and he is a stellar musician who formed the band The Maps. Last year he released a fantastic album titled 'Turning the Mind' and I have yet to hear a better album since. The content of the album seems right up Dodgem Logic's alley, and James seems like a very interesting person. It would be fantastic if Dodgem Logic could somehow involve James in a future issue, even something as tame as an interview would be great!

Carry on,
Batty McDougall
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Well, Betty (and I should watch those typing errors if I were you), I'm hardly the most 'with-it' person when it comes to modern light entertainment. I don't really keep up with who's on Juke Box Jury these days, I'm afraid, but I'll pass your request on to our musical correspondent Mr. Ingham. He's more in-the-know regarding whichever emaciated layabout you silly young scatterbrains are fouling perfectly good cinema seats over currently, although I'm told that he sometimes narrows his eyes and spits, rather uncouthly, in lieu of actual constructive criticism. By the way, I can't help noticing that like our previous correspondent you reside in Canada. If by some remote chance you should bump into Miss Cook, please try not to stare or make fun unless you genuinely can't help it.

I am so glad this (dodgem logic) exists! I may only have two copies but I will buy more soon I promise! All the articles, artwork and random shit are fucking amazing!! I swear I learned more in those 2 issues (#1, and #4) than in my whole life! Those fucking magazines have opened my mind more than I thought it could stretch; you have a faithful customer here for life. I hope to see you guys around for a loooooong time!

Ps- Alan Moore, you sir are a genius, thank you
THANK YOU!

Dodgem logic whore- vic (ghost8407)



Firstly, Victoria, I'd like to say a heartfelt thank-you for your marvellous enthusiasm. On another matter, and I hope that you don't mind me saying this, but are you really sure that in your self-description as a prostitute you might not be giving the wrong impression to young bachelors? Unless of course this is the actual career that you have chosen, possibly as a response to the proposed increases in tuition fees, in which case, best of luck and all that. I can recall, with sympathy, the lean stretch I myself endured after losing my advice column in TWINKLE & BARELY LEGAL. If I may pass on a tip, always remember that although a condom falling accidentally out of a gentleman's coat pocket upon a first meeting might seem rather forward, it is generally a better sign than if he drops a roll of duct-tape and a hammer, at least if my own experience is anything to go by.

I write from Italy with the help of Google translate.

Since I discovered you "esteemed leader", I am only asking what I could really say if I met you.

A few weeks ago I was one step away from coming to London for Un-Earthing performance, but I could not get tickets and still would not have been able to follow the magic words as I wanted, for my poor knowledge of English.

Apart from these chronicles fanatical, I take this opportunity now with this new column to show all my love to my Mangiafuoco, Stromboli.

Reading the Voice of the Fire appeared to me this vision of me as Pinocchio and Allan Moore as Mangiafuoco; for some reason, not masturbation/ intellectual, in this vision he is attracted by my feelings vibrant, by my eyes and just save me life. Perhaps Dodgem Logic be the Toyland of Pinocchio, a place where I would miss out eyes closed. Finally today I managed to order the first five issues of the journal.

I hope that one day we will meet in the magical world of the idea space as puppets or puppeteers. Forgive my English algorithmic.

With love.

Sandro Bolidesottomarino.

Sandra, I'm not sure that I caught everything that you were saying, but, reading between the lines, it may be that the issue on your mind is one that a lot of girls, even today, find it difficult to talk about directly without resorting to euphemisms such as 'falling to the Communists'; 'Aunty Flo'; or, in your own picturesque usage, 'Pinocchio'. Let me say first of all that there is nothing at all that is dirty or unnatural about Pinocchio, and his appearance is just a sign that you are becoming a young woman: Pinocchio is also, obviously, God's way of reminding us, correctly in my own opinion, that the female gender is responsible for all the evil in the world. Pinocchio may also be a punishment exacted on contemporary bohemian satirists such as Millicent Martin for their various inflammatory slogans such as 'God? She's Black!', in which case I wouldn't be surprised if something bad didn't happen to black people sooner or later, as well. Anyway, Sandra, try to

remember that Pinocchio is nothing to be scared of. He's your friend, and like all friends you should make sure you see him regularly, once a month, no more, no less. And if you haven't seen him in a while, then please contact your nearest 'missing puppets bureau'. (By which I mean 'doctor', incidentally, just so that there aren't any comical misunderstandings at such an important time.)

Dear Mr. Moor

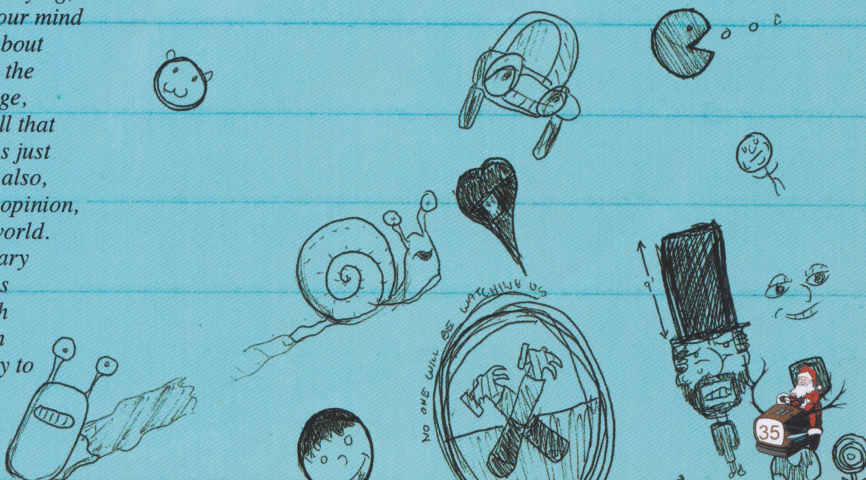
I am a professional writer exiled in Texas and really enjoy your mag. Altho' not from Northampton I went there once by accident. Anyway, I wrote this long-ish piece for a French publisher who hasn't yet brought it out called A Child's Xmas in the Blitz and wondered if you might like to put it in your mag. I have also written a Dr. Who book and a Picture book with Mr. Peake who is unfortunately dead which I enclose herewith. I love your movies by the way. I hope you and your lovely Mrs are well.

Yours sincerely

Michael Moorcock (Mr.)

Well, I never! This one's from a grown-up **man**! Sir, from your handwriting and spelling it appears that you are almost certainly a hulking Faulknerian man-child currently incarcerated on Death Row, probably for unintentionally dismaniling a toddler, and I must ask what you are doing writing to a periodical intended for the sensitively-reared eleven year-old girls that I'm reliably assured comprise the main part of our audience? Added to this, your use of a sexually provocative and self-aggrandising invented surname is entirely inappropriate to this sort of magazine, and to less kindly eyes than mine would probably be seen as grooming. Be off with you, you threatening tramp, and don't let me see you round here again!

There. I think that went rather well, don't you? Especially when you consider it's my first real letters page since that unpleasantness when I was the agony aunt on MIRABELLE & SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. If you've any comments, questions or just poorly considered opinions then please send them to WE ARE RUBBER, YOU ARE GLUE at P.O. Box 927, Northampton NN1 9DT or by pocket-telegram to info@dodgemlogic.com. Remember that your questions don't all strictly **have** to be about intimate freshness or how far one should let a boy go on a first abduction, but that I'll answer them as if they are because those are the areas that I'm most comfortable with. So, until next time, girls, toodle-pip and bully off! That's hockey terminology, by the way, and nothing at all to do with female masturbation which is anyway impossible, or so we were told in my day.



OL' BILL

REQUIEM FOR A BENT COPPER

*The Ol' Bill
A testimony of legal filth
or a bit of harmless fun
from the top of the uptown cops
on the downtown bunny run*

Illegitimi non carborundum

"Don't let the bastards grind you down" (roughly)

On a bitterly cold Christmas Night 1967 in Northampton, honest-as-the-day bent copper PC Billy Brill, the borough Police Force whipping-boy, had ingested all that he could regurgitate of perjuring his pejorative pencil to transcribe half-truths of Justice into whole-lies of Law. As his pernicious pocket-book portrayed, the letter of the law knew no justice. He loved his mum, but they mocked him as 'Mummy's boy' and now Brill needed to quit. His dutiful hopes and dreams had become pitiful fears and nightmares, blown to smithereens in a maelstrom of dodgy deals, dastardly deceits and long-arm lies. The belligerent bastards had finally ground this good mother's son down. Death at a tender age! His desire for freedom knew no boundary. For this certain scapegoat, self-preservation was approximately the richest law of nature.

Quod scripsi, scripsi

'What I have written, I have written'

It was hot-achingly cold on the graveyard-slot night-shift of a frosty Christmas night in 1967. The winter was deep, the days were crisp, the nights were even. After Christmas dinner, PC Billy Brill paradiddled with his mum's truncheon-substitute hairbrush and her trusty spatula, to the Christmas Special jauntiness of the *Z Cars* theme, 'Johnny Todd'.

But he winced at the maudlin 'Hela heba helloa' strains of the Beatles' 'Hello Goodbye' on the *Top of the Pops* Christmas extravaganza. He hated the 'You say yes, I say no' of the prophetic dirge. Nevertheless, it did give him food for thought. Sergeant Barraclough might say 'Yes' but Brill would say 'No'. The sergeant might say 'Stop' but Brill would say 'Go go go oh no.'

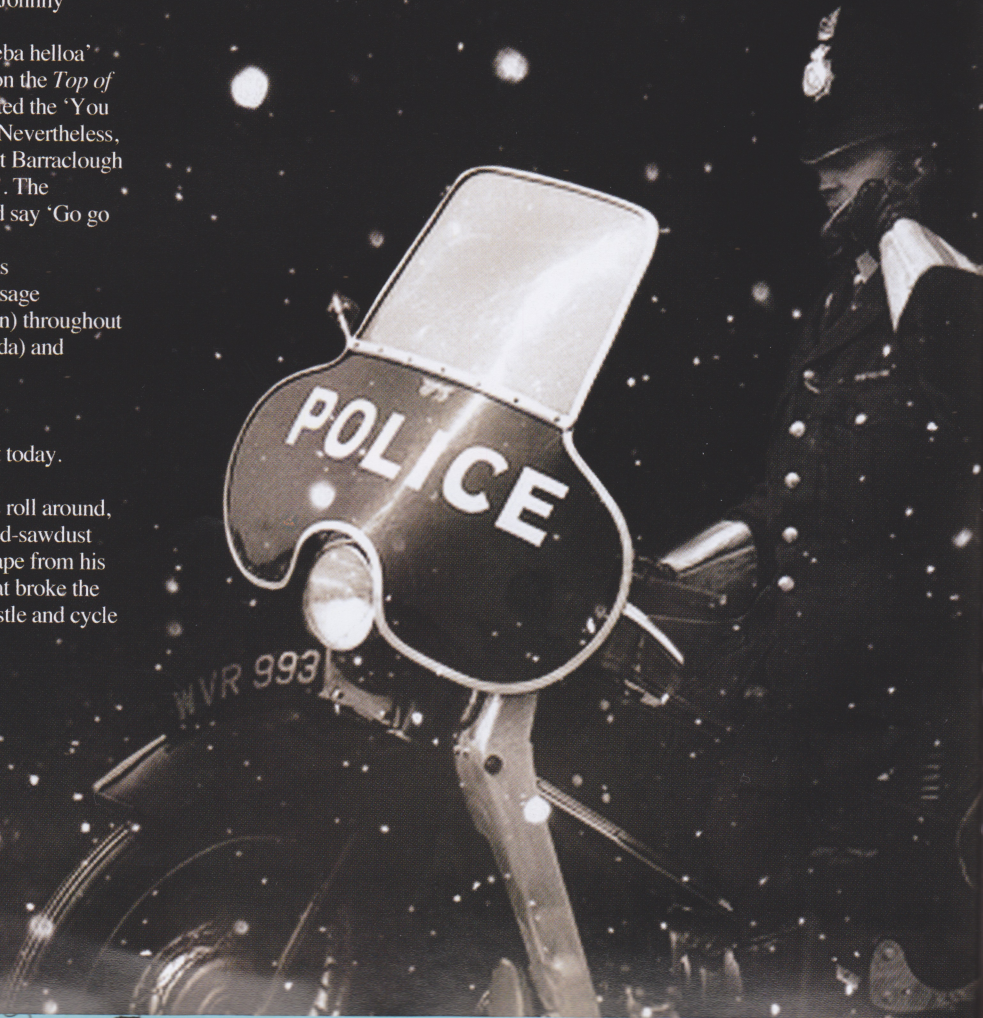
Billy Brill cringed at the sanctimonious patriotism of the Queen's Christmas message for unity in the family (especially her own) throughout the Commonwealth (prosperity for Canada) and between diverse nations:

Hey, hey, L-B-J,

Martin Luther King says the USA

is the most violent nation on the planet today.

As he watched Billy Smart's elephants roll around, free and easily trumpeting in their spit-and-sawdust circus, he decided once and for all to escape from his own spit-and-polish prison. The straw that broke the camel's back. He would hang up his whistle and cycle clips for ever.



Before setting off to work for his grand finale and surprise encore, pre-masochistic masochism urged him to spin on his Dansette 'It's Now or Never' by Elvis and 'Lights Out' by Jerry Byrne, cheery USA purchases from John Lever's. This was it. O Sole Mio. Finis.

Whatever would his guardian angel, Sergeant Charles Barraclough, say? After all, this cowardly bully had groomed Billy into a small-time thief, a big-time liar, the mess-room's favourite part-time stooge, a covert racist and an overt sexist. So Billy scribbled on the back of his mum's gas bill envelope his Top Ten Christmas Confessions, his very own Top of the Pops - a sort of dying-declaration: tantamount to a professional suicide-note; even worse, a ticket to a Beatles' concert:

"Oh Billy, did you really see them?" promiscuously probed my girlfriend Debbie on my 18th birthday, 6th November, 1963. Debbie left me wondering whether she was referring to a glimpse of the cheeks of her bum or the parts of her anatomy of which Sergeant Barraclough told me you couldn't buy many for a pound.

Castle Café prick-teaser!

"Sure did, Debs," I replied, leaving her guessing whether or not I was referring to the topless Tit-bits pin-ups the waiter had just waved in front of me, or Hurricane Henry and the Shriekers' hell-raising at Hackleton village hall.

Marefair philanderer!

"Did you see the Beatles?" she persisted, flashing her Jean Harlow eyes at me as I flicked a cube of Brigitte Bardot ice down her Jayne Mansfield cleavage. "You reckon you know which garage they've hidden their car in? Well, prove it! You take me in."

"And I'll take yours out," I wishfully thought.

Tit for tat!

PC Brill had been allocated the coveted Christmas Night Racecourse Patrol: gazing at the monkey puzzle tree up Kettering Road, enjoying the front-room Christmas tree lights in Kingsley Road, genital relief behind Racecourse Pavilion. So at Boxing Day's false dawn, what on Winter-of-Hate earth was he doing in the cavernous shop doorway of Coldham's, aka Youngster's, children's store in Abington Street, gazing through the huge windows at a Summer-of-Love heaven of Rosebud Cheerful Tearful dolls and a seductive mannequin parade of Twist and Turn Barbies?

The crèche of Rosebuds was smiling and pouting and crying for a nappy change. The slinky harem of blonde bombshell Mod Barbies in their orange bikinis and pink short-shorts were cynically objectified in order to entice him with their peroxide locks and their doe eyes, canoodling for a Christmas cuddle. Cradle snatcher!

Billy popped a couple of Café des Artistes pills and swigged some of the Lemon Hart rum he had secreted in his BSA saddlebag. He shrugged his shoulders, took out his Christmas Confessions list, knuckled away a 'speck of dust' from his eye, then broke down completely. Commiserating with him, a crestfallen chorus line on a bunny run bench, a jury of Rosebud counsellors in a Silver Cross courtroom.

He had derelicted his duty to imbibe with his clandestine accomplice, Pc Tony Jaywick, and confess his reasons for throwing in the towel. But Tony hadn't turned up, so he stuffed his list back into his pocket, along with the damp hankie from drying his cheeks and dabbing rum from his chin. Entwined with tinsel, these titivating twist-and-turn troubadours with their tornado twirls and trademark tits, twitched their tantalising torsos and twinkled their teasing eyes at his tortuous toy-town tribunal. Brill's fickle fantasies finally flipped: he was a paranoid prisoner in a crinoline courtroom.

"Oh, Billy, I'm so jealous. It must have been wonderful."

"Pain in the arse really, Debs. I was filling requisition forms in Admin and looked out the window when their Austin Princess swept past."

There's a raid going on at the Barley Mow
With Spij and Willie and Shifty and Joe
And they're burning up Harlestone Firs in a Jag
With a stash of loot in a postman's bag
They've got necklaces, fags and gallons of rum
They've just been seen near the Rifle Drum
Come with us Brill in the Crime Squad van
We don't know them so you're the man
They've smashed the optics and robbed the till
They've jumped the lights in Hopping Hill
They're doing a ton down the Harlestone Road
Now the car's in a ditch and they've dumped the load

"There's Spij, Sergeant Barraclough. By Dallington Park."

"Really? Never mind the loot. Jump out and nick the bastard, you prat."

(Or 'nick the prat, you bastard'. I can't remember which of us was which, Your Honour.)

'Your Ladyship!' was Brill's rum-induced supplication to Formal Occasion Barbie in her Smart Switch outfit, the drizzle-dash judge he had chosen for his polka-dot trial. In the window display, she presided from half-way up the Christmas tree, somewhere between the Magic Robots and the sex-in-a-box Twisters. The stench of overnight urine from the Christmas Eve Phipps' pints-of-ordinary revellers wafted around the doorway, its pungent one-and-ten-pence aroma mingling with the warmth of his Lemon Hart release as the temperature dropped and the rum took effect.

'I was bullied into nicking my best mate, Your Eminence. It killed me. Spij used to dress up in his sister's high heels and entertain me with his 'feely ones'. (This was the first-time Brill had confessed these eye-blinding events. Spij's sister Dusanka, who apparently enjoyed watching her brother administering Brill's ravishment and relief (twist & shout) said that had it gone down her throat with the force that it splashed over the Minnie Mouse poster above his bed-head, it would have squirted out of her ears.)

Even Bendable Leg Ken frowned when Brill went on to confess that Spij and he would also swap the Kamera magazines they'd nicked. Spij called Brill 'his old wanker' since he returned Paula Page naked on horseback, stuck fast to Avra Bennet nude in a Buick, a Harrison Marks papier-mache collage.

"And then?" Debbie coke-spluttered, dreamily fascinated, vaguely swooning.

"I asked Sergeant Barraclough if I could take a break and see them before their CID car trip to the ABC. Sarge said, 'Bollocks!'"

I had the last laugh, though. For toilet breaks it was two minutes for a number one and seven minutes for a number two. So I combined my bog visits and signed out for nine. He was stumped.

"Oh, Billy. You're wonderful. Nine minutes with the Beatles."



Wonderful, my arse! I couldn't have cared less. I only wanted their autographs. I guillotined half-a-dozen of the typists' pink copy-sheets, grabbed a couple of pens (not enough) and ran to the garage.

"Did you really get to see them, Billy?" Debbie persisted. "Well, did you?"

It was a quarter past four, and Brill was getting exasperated talking to a load of dummies about a load of crap. Where the fuck was Tony?
A promise from Alice?
A trick from Rose?
A snog in the alleyway?
Nobody knows.

From where Brill shivered in Coldham's doorway, slightly pissed, stinking of piss, wallowing in piss and thoroughly pissed off, he glanced up and down Abington Street, schizoid about the pissing mess he was in. He was surrounded in the gutter by the very semen of the past life that his mum had wept despairingly over from swilling-out his twin-tub hankies: the nudes at the New (featuring Peaches Page), the Notre Dame nymphomaniacs (featuring Dusanka), the Lynn's Café Teds (featuring Nogger), the ABC slashers (featuring himself and his Emporium Arcade flick-knife), the Wimpy Bar flirts (Debbie) and the Building Society beauties (all of them). His former life was defined by these nostalgic Boxing Day flashbacks along the bunny run: fags, birds, rock 'n' roll, cow-horn handlebars, booze, films, Tit-bits, Reveille: there was nothing else in life to masturbate over.

**There's a chase going on and they're blocking the town
From King's Heath to Duston they're closing roads down
But the car that was stolen had long since been found
Doors hanging open with loot all around
And the crooks had all legged it with no place to go
Make a name for yourself Billy you know them you know**

"So that's Shifty, is it, Brill?" whispered Sergeant Barraclough to his reluctant protégé, as Brill glanced shiftily across Spencer Bridge Road.
"Don't worry about the loot. Jump out and collar the bleeder, you twat."
(Or 'collar the twat, you bleeder'. By that stage I couldn't give a fuck, Your Illustriousness.)

'Your Illustriousness, I am indeed a failure,' PC Brill confided, swigging more rum as he slunk back inside the shop-doorway dock: the cesspit courtroom for his cosmetic-tribunal. He was incensed that PC Jaywick had not turned up, so it was to the captive-audience liberators that he made a spectacle of himself:

'It was Shifty who taught me how to fondle breasts behind Midsummer Meadow baths, your Ladyship. He did it by numbers.'

Billy was distracted by another bunny-run barrister. Vintage Francie had the same temptress body as Barbie, with dollar-sign legs, a sexpot mini-skirt, profit-margin eyelashes and consumer-society breasts. She pouted at him seductively. Perhaps she fancied him. Ken with painted hair and killer wardrobe looked on, somewhat perplexed, mightily jealous. Or perhaps she felt sorry for Brill. Ken would be a much better proposition.

'Your Fondleness, Shifty invited Dusanka and Grace to lean against a tree. Spij would have gone barmy! Peck, release, peck, remove, peck, beep, peck, beep, peck, slurp, peck, grope, peck, back-to-the-fair, peck, candyfloss, peck, dodgems, peck, logic, peck, hot-dogs, peck, stick-this-in-your-gob, peck, home-to-mum, swig, Scrabble, swig, seven-letter word, swig, 'o-r-g-a-s-m-s', swig, shit mustn't-use-it, swig, bed, fuck, aching-scrotum, fuck, fit-to-burst, aah, explosion, aah, hankie, aah, twin-tub!'

"Billy, swill your hankie out first!"

"Fuck! Rumbled!"

The confessions of a bent copper were plummeting to their nadir as he transferred the guilt of his own deviance onto the burgeoning shoulders of his friends and family.

'Dusanka was mum's friend Irena's daughter, Your Latex.'

Brill inspected the plastic beauties, pretty in tinsel, sparkling in the Christmas lights, stunningly aware in their honest appraisal. Nevertheless, the mediating mannequin parade reminded him of the fashion shows up on Dusanka's mezzanine whilst their mums knitted and nattered in the garden.

'I would sit half way up the stairs and Dusanka would parade along the landing. With a lace curtain she would be Cleopatra; with high heels and a dust-cover she would be Marilyn Monroe; in a feather boa and pearl necklace she would be the Queen of Sheba; with her freeze-frame bottom she would be a Windmill nude; with high kicks she would be a Tiller Girl; gyrating on the bath mat with a loofah she would be Gillian Hills and her Beat Girl fantasy. The deal was to review the stock, but not touch!'

'That was until Midsummer Baths, Your Lustfulness. Thank you, Shifty!'

Ringo wound down the window and greeted me wearily. John was slouching rear-right, George bolt upright rear-middle and Paul was slumped behind Ringo. They were drowsily-chirpy enough, and we chatted about Beatles' haircuts versus police short-back-and-sides; Beatles' jackets versus police uniforms; what I thought about their fringes; how life in uniform was cramping my style.

Ringo asked me if I liked being a police cadet, and whether I would make a career out of it. John chipped in with some quips about my haircut. George was very quiet and Paul looked bored. I wasn't especially overawed. I didn't particularly like them.

"Yes, and I got their autographs on eighteen sheets, one for each year of my life: fourteen sheets with one, two or three on; four with them all on. Here's one for you with all four, Debs."

"Fantastic, Billy. What a great birthday present for you - eighteen sheets of autographs. I want to see their car. Take me there now."

'The caretaker's car was outside the bike sheds and two maintenance men drove past after fixing the school boiler. A shoe-box containing ten stolen watches had been re-snatched from the passenger seat.'

The rum was really talking now!

'DC Perkins advised me that the men had records and we had their photos. He took me to show the caretaker two sets of seven photographs, which included the suspects.'

'The caretaker identified the thieves. There was no evidence, but the case was scheduled for court. Just before the case was called, I was summoned to the superintendent's office.'

"Congratulations, Brill. They're going to throw out the case because your silly baby-wet statement isn't worth the paper it is written on. You showed the caretaker two sets of **seven** photos. You should've shown two sets of **twelve**. You damn silly arse. I could kick your arse! Right crooks; wrong evidence!"

"Then DC Perkins came in with the missing shoe-box and ten watches, saying he had just found them behind the bike sheds."

Billy was warming to the task: Barbie and her vintage ensemble looked sympathetic; they were no fools. If Brill was going to quit, he would drag down half the force with him.

"DC Perkins smirked at me: "Sorry, Billy, it wasn't stolen in the first place."

"The crooks laughed at me: "Tough luck, pal! But hey, you can't win 'em all."

"The superintendent scowled at me: "No evidence, you clown. You're on a charge!"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Brill was getting sick of this drunken game. It was half past four. That cheating bastard Tony wouldn't be coming now. Brill was too pissed to carry on watching over Northampton. His mind was fucked up. Moreover, if the bigoted Sergeant Barraclough were to find him now, he would be pronounced guilty of being drunk in charge of a pedal cycle, urinating in a shop doorway, contempt of court and gross sexual perversion.

I did a deal. If Debbie would promise to get her tits out in the Beatles' car, I would risk breaking into it. After all, Beatles were Beatles and tits were tits.

Off we went to Campbell Square. We popped into the Traffic Office. I slipped the key off the hook. We crossed the yard. We crept in.

We clambered into the back seats. I had the urge to sit in John Lennon's place. I had taste! Debbie had the urge to curl up kissing and cuddling me from George's seat. I got the urge to go a little further. Would Debbie have the urge to carry out her promise?

"Billy, I've got the urge to collect souvenirs," Debbie counter-urged.

"Well, be quick about it, Debs," I urged. (Apart from America's urge to enter Vietnam, never before in the history of urging had the urge been so urged.)

She had the urge to open her handbag and grab anything that took the urge - from seats, floor and glove compartments. There was a matchstick, a cigarette packet, a ticket for something or other, some fluff, a comb, a coin, a sweet wrapper, a matchbox, maybe a ball-point pen.

Once she had stolen all the Beatles' rubbish she wanted, I tried to squeeze her tits and she tried to find my willy to squeeze that, too. Tit for tat! But we panicked and fled, like bunnies running in headlights. Nothing kills the libido in the back of a Beatles' car more than sitting in the back of a Beatles' car panicking that a Beatle might catch you on the job.

"Come on Debs. Tuck your blouse in. We'll be late for the show." Corny but verbatim.

The two maintenance men were later arrested in Nottinghamshire with a stash of antique furniture. Bombshell! A third thief caught red-handed was bent copper DC Perkins, who had been in cahoots with them for years: pocketing porn mags; filching office furniture; pilfering pill-shaped ponds; purloining plastic dado rails; nicking lead piping; robbing offertory boxes - he'd dabbled in the lot. Bastard!

**There's a scam going on and you don't want to know
About Spij and Shifty and Willie and Joe
With two in the slammer and two more to go
Brill pitied the Crime Squad and the poor Barley Mow
Two friends had been taken two friends on the run
If Brill wasn't careful he'd end up with none
He saw Willie in Clare Street and turned a blind eye
He saw Joe near the Golf House but Brill walked straight by
He was sick of the police force and his friends would be jailed
But he knew his mum loved him for he'd tried and he'd failed**

Brill got out his torch and browsed through his pocket-book notes for Christmas Eve. He asked Barbie to take them into consideration.

At 11pm I was cycling up Norfolk Street when I noticed a Hillman Husky broken down outside Thompson's shop on the corner with Norfolk Terrace. I went and phoned HQ who sent out Willey's breakdown firm. I pushed the woman driver towards the kerbside where she could safely wait. She was clearly frightened.

"She got in it and steered. As I pushed it, Reg Willey flew past us shouting, "You fucking thief," then sped off down St Andrew's Road. I told her to be patient. Willey would come back. I cycled off."

This is what I encountered but did not write:

"At midnight I walked into headquarters, only to find Willey behind the counter holding a bottle of rum. As car mechanics do, he was lubricating the Duty Sergeant, office staff and two traffic cops - eight drunken coppers in all. Bastards. Willey (a bastard, too) snitched to Sergeant Barraclough (bastards were coming out of your ears) who slapped me on a discipline charge for trying to deny the breakdown man his call-out fee. He called me a liar when I said I was only trying to help. Northampton's very own Christmas protection racket: breakdown call-outs in return for booze. Tit for tat! Willey had the force in his pocket."

The Barbie prosecutors twisted and turned in disbelief. The Rosebud Tearful Cheerfuls would have wept and wee'd had someone stuck a bottle in their mouths. Billy asked the bench to take three other cases into consideration before he drank the last of his rum and the lights went out over Abington Street.

"Where the hell am I going to sleep tonight?" was Rosie Hamilton's rhetorical question at the bed-sit in Barrack Road where her mattress had been flung out of the bedroom window.

"I discovered the mattress in a soggy heap, soaked to the springs with urine. I told Rosie that the landlord had every right to sling it out. The landlord said that her husband was doing seven months in Armley Gaol, and Rosie kept getting pissed and sleeping around.

"When hubbie got out, he heard about a copper hob-nobbing with his wife. After getting her head kicked in, Rosie confessed that she was having it away with a local bobby. She couldn't name the toe-rag, but (surprise, surprise) remembered my number! That's how the sergeant traced me."

"Get in my office, you filthy sod," yelled Sergeant Barraclough. "Explain what you've been getting up to with Rosie Hamilton."

"There'd been a complaint by Chisel Wilkinson (outraged husband) who has accused a certain PC 280 (me) of having sex with a certain spouse (Rosie) whilst he was doing seven months porridge (Armley) which was traced in the Occurrence Book by an eagle-eyed thick-head (Sgt. Barraclough).



'Barraclough cautioned me.'

"Yes, sarge; thank you, sarge."

'There I went again, guilty before being proved innocent, with an opportunity to apologise should I feel the urge.'

'Yes, I did feel the fucking urge.'

"Pe Townsend leaves his Jimmy's End beat," I grassed, "has some free beer down the brewery," I blabbed, "cycles through town," I revealed, "and sleeps with Rosie," I coffin-nailed.

"Or so he brags in the mess room. Poor Rosie wouldn't know his number because the smart-arse takes his jacket off first, and she's as gullible as hell. She can remember my number because I often meet her in Lynn's café."

"Your police career is over, Brill."

"Not mine, sarge. Townsend's."

There's a pact being made with the Hopping Hill two
We won't lock you up but here's what you must do
Tell us the names of some burglars and crooks
Their descriptions and motives their style and their looks
I will scratch your back if you will scratch mine
Don't put any Spinney Hill names on the line
Don't mention the Masons don't stab in the back
You came in the front door fuck off out the back
Stick this rum in you pocket and close your big gob
Get back on your cycle get back on the job

Debbie and Billy had crept in the back door and strolled out the front, mop-top detritus stuffing her bulging handbag.

"Thanks, Billy. I'm off now," she said, as she jumped into her dad's car after the show. "I've had a wonderful time."

What a fucking awful birthday. Eighteen, a man without a manhood.

'Your Honour, you couldn't hear a word the Beatles tried to sing. Gayeway's Ron Stanley had pleaded in the Chronicle & Echo for fans to subdue their screams and enjoy the performance. Good job it fell on deaf ears! But Peter Jay & the Jaywalkers were great!'

"What happened to the rest of the tickets, Billy?"

"I took them down to the nurses' home and flogged them at five bob a throw."

"What, all of them?" asked Debbie.

"All except two: the one I gave to you, and the one I kept for myself. It was pot luck how many autographs each had; it was a straight five bob."

Two nurses got all four autographs for peanuts, jammy sods! For the little I gave them, I didn't ask much. The bonus was that six of these nurses agreed to the plan to set up Gerry Perry for the Black Lion drugs raid.

"And what about the autographs you kept for yourself?"

"I put them in a picture frame and some thieving beatnik nicked them from my dressing table at my eighteenth birthday party. Ain't nothing sacred, Debbie?"

"Ain't I, Billy?" Debbie wondered, "Ain't I?"

Under the gaze of the legal bimbos, Brill's confessions made steamy windows:

'I colluded with the Wednesday evening drugs raid down The Black Lion when we saw the Apex Group.'

'The raid was Deb's idea. Cadet Gerry Perry had eyes for her and kept molesting her. Debbie had a brainwave. She sold him some bullshit about the half-a-dozen nurses who came with us to the Black Lion. She said they had raided the controlled drugs cabinet, and would be selling off some elicit shit at the performance.'

'Gerry swallowed it and shot out to raise the alarm. In less than half an hour he returned with a dozen uniformed cops and the CID.'

'The Apex left the stage. We were all frisked. Debbie and I got searched in the passageway.'

'I cannot give you what I do not have,' Debbie told the intrusive policewoman - and sure enough, along with the six angels of mercy, she was clean.

There were no drugs. Gerry Perry had made a complete arse of himself. He called Deb a fucking tart and me a fucking lunatic. We drifted back to the nurses' home, pissing ourselves.

'Debbie never had any more problems with Gerry. She was tempted into giving him her hand in marriage. Since he got booted out of the force, they've run a post office in Kent.'

'Dusanka's sister was a great kid who loved the package tours. Whenever I was on duty at the ABC, Angelinka kept turning up with Kamilka and Trudka, undoing my tunic buttons and stuffing their autograph books inside. I kept leaving my post to go to the dressing rooms and getting into trouble with Sergeant Barraclough.'

'On mornings after the shows, they would turn up on my doorstep. Mum would get me out of bed to give the books back to them. They would have jumped into bed with me, I presumed, had mum not been there.'

Even at a quarter to five on a freezing Boxing Day morning, Billy was aroused by his schoolgirl fantasies. His mum's presence at home had guaranteed no repeats of the Minnie Mouse incidents.

He had never felt so lonely. He was as drunk as a barrister and as miserable as a probation officer. His rum had gone. He'd had another piss in the shop doorway and he was desperate to sit down. Outside the Wedgwood restaurant opposite, he noticed an orange box and went across to sit on it.

He applied a little trick that Sergeant Barraclough had taught him that made it impossible to fall asleep on nights. He had sat Brill on the Grammar School wall in Billing Road. He made him take out his truncheon and dangle it between his legs. At the moment Brill might drop off to sleep the truncheon would release from his grip and bounce onto the path. This would make him jump. He called his truncheon his little alarm clock, and it worked every time.

Brill sat there, gazing up at the ABC cinema, dangling his truncheon. On the Gene Pitney tour, Sergeant Barraclough had caught him sneaking up to the singer's dressing room. He was armed with the autograph books Angelinka, Kamilka and Trudka had teased him with. These Notre Dame schoolgirls!

After Barraclough had been chatting to Julie Rogers, he instructed Brill to present his truncheon to Gene Pitney because it was made of the same redwood that was found near his Canadian home. It would be a cherished souvenir for Gene, who was gracious and delighted.

The next day Brill, before he was issued with another one, was put on a charge because he had 'lost' his truncheon. Sergeant Barraclough had told him he would cover him. Bloody liar. He denied all knowledge of meeting Gene Pitney because he had also been caught out of bounds, something he said would never happen.

Brill's mission of confessing his sins to Tony Jaywick had failed. Instead he had been given the fairest hearing he had ever had, by a window-full of charitable dolls who had renounced his drunken misogyny and pronounced an open verdict. It did feel that the Christmas party was over, until...

Brill got off the orange box, pocketed his truncheon and was staggering back to Coldham's doorway to collect his bike to return to the racecourse, when he was bowled over by a bolt from the blue.

Round St Giles' Terrace corner who should come swaggering along, but a cocksure Sergeant Barraclough with a bird on either arm - Brill's secret lover Rosie Hamilton and her Auntie Alice!

"Hello, hello, hello. And to what do we owe this unexpected pleasure this fine Boxing Day morning?"

Hung!

"Oh I do like your pearl necklace, Alice."

Drawn!

"You smell like a brothel, sergeant. But you smell like a Barley Mow boudoir, Rosie!"

Quartered!

"I see you've got his number, Rosie. And the name is Barraclough."

"That's B-a-r-r-a-c-l-o-u-g-h."

"Charlie. That's C-u-n-t!"

After the grand finale, the encore!

"And what about your friend Jaywick's number, Rosie, and where does this leave me?"

Jugulated!

"That's J-a-y-w-i-c-k."

"Tony. That's A-r-s-e-h-o-l-e."

The final curtain (booooo). Applause (muted). Exit stage left (fuck off).

The cast, in no particular order of appearance, took a final bow in the gloom of Coldham's doorway, which now stank of piss, rum, sweat, eau de Cologne and if your nostrils were astute - shit. The stage lights dipped. The Christmas tree lights dimmed and the dress-circle was in darkness.

"It's now or never, Brill thought. Lights out."

There's a pact being made with the Semilong two
With Rosie and Alice and the bastard in blue
Here's perfume and jewellery a sizeable cut
You can fuck off with Tony and keep your mouths shut
Say nothing to Rosebud keep well clear of Ken
No flirting with Francie don't come here again
All coppers are rascals all laws made are shit
I'll go home to mum and tell her I've quit
I rest my case Barbie with your flounce Assize
I've a cop in my pocket and tears in my eyes
Caught hook line and sinker with no boundary pass
You can stick my mum's hairbrush up your fraudulent arse

"Yes, Billy. Thank you, Billy."

Tit for tat!

PC 280 Billy Brill told his mum that it was all up for him in the borough Police Force. She hugged him and said that she already knew. Off he went to see the superintendent to tell him why the fuck he was resigning. The superintendent felt personally slighted and went bonkers. He reminded Brill of the cost to the tax-payer for training him: Admin; General Office; CID; Fingerprints and Photography; Traffic; Information Room; Outward Bound in Wales; Day Release at Tec; Life-Saving up The Mounts; First Aid down St John's Ambulance; Ryton-on-Dunsmore; Folkestone; Ripon. The superintendent had taught Brill all that he knew about life on the Thin Blue Line, and Brill still knew sweet fuck all.

As Brill was leaving Campbell Square, Sergeant Barraclough invited him into his office, saying how sorry he was to see him go, and how discretion was a virtue. He trusted Brill would keep his mouth shut, courteously helped him to politely draft his letter of resignation, and said they must meet for lunch sometime.

Back home, his mum emptied his pockets before putting his trousers in the wash. She found screwed up with his tear-stained hankie her damp gas bill envelope. She leaned against the twin-tub. As gently as she would ease apart his wankie-hankies, she unravelled the list that PC Arsehole never did get to see. After wiping her tears on her careworn pinafore, she read:

My Christmas Confessions

10 stolen watches
9 Beatles' minutes
8 drunken coppers
7 months in prison
6 plotting nurses
5 bob a throw
4 jewellery thieves
3 star-struck girls
2 truncheon capers
And a snog in the back of a car

Felix Sit Annus Novus!

'Happy New Year!' from The Ol' Bill

Sit vis vobisvum

'May the Force be with you'







HAVE MOICY!

Dick Foreman takes a brief poke around the life and work of American singer-songwriter and artist, Michael Hurley.

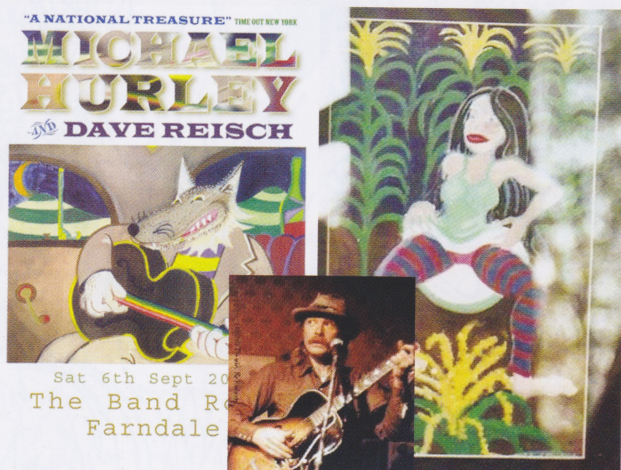
You could hardly call it a 'career'. Best part of 50 years spent driving himself round the USA in a variety of iconic jalopies to sing his own songs and his idiosyncratic covers in bars, coffee-houses and all kinds of low rent venues. It never was a 'living'. He did it for fun; he was a bohemian, a hipster. It was just part of life. He still does. It still is.

As for the actual business of making a living, "I had all these odd jobs. I had a pattern of – I'd pay my rent and work a couple of months and quit. As soon as my rent was paid and I had full groceries I'd quit. And take a few weeks off. And then I'd run out of money and go get another job."

A song of his goes: "I paint a design on the sign for you Mister / I paint a design pretty good / I paint a white horse or a fire breathin' dragon / I paint a design on your wagon." Paint designs he did, along with curiously rambling comic strips featuring hep, hard-drinking dog boys Boone and Jocko and a trumpet-mouthed fertility spirit known as Kornbread. Virtually every one of a series of sporadically produced albums that bear his name features his artwork on the cover. He's got an eye for a beautiful woman in a short sexy dress; ornate river boats; the rich interiors of his beloved Chevys and Plymouths, and through the windows – always – stylised hills that look like bumps wearing stripy t-shirts.

One time in the mid-80s, "I framed up a bunch of my paintings and took them down to a gig... I hung up 11 of them onstage. I sold 7. That was the beginning of the end for me doing other jobs – selling Christmas trees, house painting, working at a barbecue stand."

Michael Hurley was born, we're told, on December 20, 1941 – 13 days after Pearl Harbor. He grew up in eastern Pennsylvania, but the family would make frequent sojourns to Florida where his father was "producing operettas... We enjoyed the journey up and down the east coast. That was how I first came to hear the pedal steel guitar of country western music. We would go into these steel joints on the ways to and from Florida. Hank Williams was still alive. Every year we went to Florida, Hank Williams was still pickin' and puttin' out hits like 'Hey, Good Lookin'".



A swindle put Hurley senior out of the operetta business. "The next year he got into promoting a smog-eliminating device that was supposed to fix the problem in LA and we all drove across the country in a Willy's Jeep station wagon." Though the family eventually settled back in the US north east, these wanderings must have got into the young Michael's system. "When I was 17 I began to ramble. A muskrat will do the exact same thing. I hitchhiked to New Orleans, New York and Mexico. I was then learning to play the guitar. I was having a lot of fun with it and eventually became a loco local party entertainer with Robin Remailly."

Robin Remailly was the writer of 'Euphoria', an oft-covered 60s song richly infused with sheer relish for drugs. He and Hurley struck up a friendship, travelling, living and making music together, though Hurley it seems was luckier than his buddy when it came to staying out of prison. They drifted to New York and the Greenwich Village folk scene of the mid-60s, making links with Steve Weber and Peter Stampfel of the outrageous Holy Modal Rounders and Jesse Colin Young, who went on to find low key fame with his band The Youngbloods in the swiftly approaching psychedelic era.

Hurley had been writing songs for several years by then, and from the start his songs were unique. Years later, Peter Stampfel wrote of one of Hurley's earliest, 'Tea Song' – "So familiar has it become that I tend to forget how seriously strange it is. Impossible to wear out, always a joy to sing, this song is imbued with some kinda powerful mojo that just won't quit. Notice the chords – it's almost the classic rock and roll 4-chord progression – C / A minor / F / G. Only the last 2 chords are reversed – C / A minor / G / F. I've never seen another song that uses that haunting and obvious progression."

Hurley has been known to object to the tag of 'folk singer', and will reel off long and fascinating lists of his influences including bluesmen (notably John Lee Hooker, from whom he lifted a cavalier attitude to rhythmic structures that most conventional musicians stick to), early rock and rollers, country and bluegrass musicians. But there is, nevertheless, a folk sensibility to the way his songs are worded.

They have a rolling, homely strangeness. They are populated by souls on the lam, spirits roaming alone until they make occasional connections in pool halls, bars and roadside eating joints. And they tap into that undying stream of images that are shared through traditional songs, where card sharps and cuckoo birds merge in sequences of verse that have no apparent connection yet somehow hang together in one great continuity.

"And the Hog of the Forsaken O he ain't like you and I / with bones always breakin' and no place to go lie / he's in the bog so dark and wet and he's got so much time / he ain't even worried yet, the Hog of the Forsaken, he is the pork of crime."

The lines are somehow slapdash yet perfect. There's craft in Hurley's songs, but they come out sounding like they've always been in existence, just waiting for the man to get around to singing them. Which he does, eventually, when it suits him to do so...

So there he was, early 60s, on the road with Remailly, living the high life – a little too high, maybe, just into his 20s he found himself simultaneously afflicted with hepatitis, mononucleosis and the early stages of tuberculosis. Upon discharge from hospital, fortuitously aided by a hitchhiking encounter with a sound recordist for the then-prestigious Folkways record label, Hurley got to record 12 of his songs. The album, 'First Songs' was released in 1965 (and again 2002 under the name 'Blueberry Wine'). "When the Folkways album came out I went to Mexico for six months. I didn't have the slightest idea that it wouldn't be the thing to do after an album came out."

This set the pattern. An inveterate drifter, Hurley would, as likely as not, find himself sleeping in trailers, chicken coops and once he built himself a teepee and set it deep in woodland. When other teepee builders came to join him, Hurley moved on deeper into the woods. He'd keep one step ahead, one step away from the world of rationality, contemplatively sipping his tea with honey.

Meanwhile, old pal Jesse Colin Young came to get his taste of Top Ten success with the Youngbloods. As seemed to happen a lot in the early seventies, he got offered the chance to run his own record label, a subsidiary to Warner Bros, with the down-home moniker: Raccoon Records. "Jesse always said he wanted to put me on some records. I always thought, 'This sounds like a good one. Sure!'" But it happened. Twice. The albums, 'Armchair Boogie' and 'Hi Fi Snock Uptown', began to establish Hurley's reputation – such as it ever was. The former was once described by music writer Byron Coley as "one of the most intimately crude recordings ever released by a major label"; the latter introduced the nickname by which Hurley is often known – 'Snock' – with sometime variants such as 'Doc Snock' and 'Elwood Snock'. A good few of the songs on these albums are catchy, throwaway ditties; but more of them are deeply haunting – they get into your system and send dark shivers up and down your spine.

Gigging by then with a motley outfit named 'The Redbirds', Hurley didn't get to make another record until the mid-70s, when he contributed to an album known as 'Have Moicy', with Peter Stampfel and Oregon band Jeffery Fredericks and the Clamtone. If you've not come across 'Have Moicy' and you have a taste for rootsy Americana, witty crazed songs of lowlifes, weirdoes, dead people and talking animals, for fuck's sake just buy this one. It's still available on CD – the label's 'Rounder'. You won't regret it and you'll save me casting about for any more words to describe its timeless excellence.

He got to make two more albums for Rounder: 'Long Journey' and 'Snockgrass'. He'd pretty much perfected his form by then and wassinging and playing with finesse. They featured a fine cast of supporting musicians and a few degrees of production sheen, thus some devotees find these albums a little too slick and 'professional'. Personally, I think they're wonderful, every song a delight and as good an introduction to Hurley's work as you could wish to find. They should have made him a 'household name'. They didn't. Rounder was a small, obscure blues/folk label; Hurley was still as likely to bugger off to the back woods of Oregon or Vermont as to involve himself in promotional activities.

In the 80s and early 90s his output was apparently sparse, a couple of one-off albums on even more obscure labels, a couple of 7" singles. But this was not entirely the case. He took a kind of 'cottage industry' approach to his work. Under the self-drawn logo of 'Bellemeade Phonics' he reissued his own deleted early albums on cassette, along with a series of new 'Snocko Music' cassettes: live performances and fresh studio/home recorded material. Also on

sale were his comics and artwork. If you got on his mailinglists you'd get occasional copies of 'Snocko News', not so much a newsletter, as a set of curious musings, cartoons and poems.

Now, 'Snocko News' has online incarnations, the cassettes have been replaced by CDRs, but otherwise it's business as usual. Exchange your pounds for bucks at the bank, send for his wares, and they'll come in a package addressed by his own hand.

The sense of cottage industry around Hurley is further enhanced by the work of Dublin's Brendan Foreman (no relation!) who began with a Hurley fanzine called 'Blue Navigator' in the early 90s. With its delightful motto: "Only mistakes where none intended", the fanzine is as sporadic and anarchic as the man it honours. Despite the laid-back approach, Foreman has done a great deal to promote Hurley in recent years – releasing CDs, / organising tours of the UK and doing what he can to up the man's profile. We can only thank him for undertaking this \ probably thankless task...

Or perhaps not so thankless. Hurley's recorded output here in the 21st Century seems more intense than it's ever been. Assisted, as usual, by admirers of his work, there's been a succession of CDs, most recently on Davendra Banhart's 'Gnomonsong' label, and various vinyl releases besides. Along with the likes of Vashti Bunyan and Robin Williamson, he's an icon to the 'new folk' movement, and his songs have been frequently covered by younger artists.

Hurley's own performances, these days, do tend to show the signs of advancing years. The throwaway ditty count in his songwriting is somewhat higher, but he can still provide breathtaking moments in songs such as 'The Rue of Ruby Whores' and 'Dying Crapshooter's Blues' ("dig my grave with the ace of spades...").

So, as Christmas comes to Dodgem Logic land, do yourself a favour – buy someone you love a Michael Hurley album, and getone for yourself while you're at it.

The last words are his.

"I take me a room at the Intrepid Traveller's Inn, where the winds of eternity sweep across the last crossroads before hell, where our absences are each other's presences and the aimless blue navigators rave on."

(Thanks to: Brendan Foreman, Sandy Harsch, Byron Coley, Frank van den Elzen, Peter Margasak and Matt Bushlow.)

Artwork: Michael Hurley. Poster designs: Brendan Foreman
www.bluenavigator.net www.snockonews.net





When I first entered a record shop, I had no idea what music to pick, back when I was a kid. So I chose almost all my albums by the pictures on the sleeves. Cal Tjader's *Breeze From the East*. *Hokusai's Wave*, Getz/Gilberto. A nice abstract of orange and black impasto swipes. In those days it was important that the cover of a record, just like a book, indicated the feel of the contents. I built up a handsome collection of jazz with that formula and it strangely never let me down.

I became emotionally attached to anything Brazilian in music. There wasn't an awful lot available at the time but the soft sounds of Astrid Gilberto's voice and the rhythms of samba became ingrained into my being. Whenever I fell in love (which was often) or wanted to paint something genuinely from the heart, I put on those few and precious albums which would always help me find my emotional bearings.

What I'm saying is that, just like Rousseau fell in love with an Africa he only ever saw in black and white engravings, I fell in love with my ideas of a fantastic and mythical Brazil. It was the perfect paradise, full of dancing, joyous, costumed, golden umber and ebon people who were not like those I grew up with, nor those I walk among.

Two years ago I was invited to a comic convention in Brazil. I would have been on my own. I'd watched several heartbreaking

films about the real people and their very real and terrible problems, and my imagination went into crisis mode. What if I actually witness a child crawling from a manhole under cover of dark, only to be shot like a pesky pigeon in order to keep the tourists from going off their après-theatre snack in the hotel across the street? There was talk of a celebration for Neimeyer, the infamous architect of ferociously modern concrete Brazilia, the city that was plotted into a tract of rain forest, as I'd heard it. I would have been required to raise a glass to

this geezer, which I would have not fancied doing...so I declined their generous offer with apologies.

This year Paul Gravette and Kevin O'Neill, both friends in the industry, were invited to the launch of a new con in Rio with me and I jumped at the chance to go, figuring that at least I would not be on my tod if things got too weird.

Standing at the window of the plane as we flew over the city I had decided I must see



1

1: Kevin O'Neill with iron horse on Leopoldina Station





Salvador at sunrise, I was one of only two people to catch the unbelievable vista below. Over a smoke-blue mountain range were floating herds of cloud-sheep drifting past in dreamtime. As the thin line of gold peeked over the horizon, sudden sweeps of pale apricot mist descended, mixing with an unexpected powder blue. Soon we would be soaring over Belo Horizonte, 5422 miles from Paris.

I'd heard about the miles of plastic shield-like fencing which line the freeway into Rio from the airport. If anything, they add to the Mad Max quality of the abandoned feeling of the poorly disguised slums, or favelas. Every few feet there would appear a hideous factory-stamped teddy bear or awful curly-haired dolly on the chipped Perspex, to add to the unkempt pathos. The favelas themselves are at least honest. People live there. They often as not have constructed the dwellings themselves. Many of them have no roofs, so you can see into the lives of families who have no escape from the burning sun.

I was relieved when I saw bits of clothing hanging here and there. I spied a father with his tiny child out for a walk while the sun was more merciful, circling an oily, wounded square where one botanical survivor from the rainforest stood fruiting in isolation, perhaps not unheedful of the numbed bareness of the lives toing and froing beneath its sparse shade. Looking to the right brought a wondrous sight. An open warehouse afforded us a glimpse of papier-mache giants being readied for Carnival. A twenty-foot pearl-white face with neat black hair was crying a single black tear and looking up to the overpass, seemingly for succour.

We were taken to the RioComicon after a bit of a nap. The most amazing venue I've certainly ever been to, and unlike any other, I'm sure. It was being held in an abandoned train station, the Leopoldina, to be exact. A ferric wonderland full of rotting engines which resemble snorting seahorses with cogs for eyes

and nostrils held back from attack only by disintegrating cables. Clouds of orange rust rise up around your sandals as you stroll the timeless silence between the ages of speed and efficiency, stopped by something more powerful than even the imperatives of history. Monsters arise from auburn shadows arching against engineering masters and fall back again into a cadmium twilight. At night the boxcars in their smeared roseate repose are underlit by pink ground spots.

After a four-hour stint drawing and signing books, I slid happily into a plastic chair, ate a square of homemade Brazilian pizza, downed a cup of fresh mango ice cream and listened to the dreamy strains of a pianist down the tracks playing classical Brazilian melodies. It would have been lovely to bed down on a mat on the platform and awake next morning to the sounds of our unseen accompanist...

In the morning we decided to go to Sugar Loaf Mountain. It was not a sunny humid day like the day before it, where we had spotted one of the locally legendary figures of Rio out for a stroll. He had been of indeterminate age, graceful in his carriage, dreadlocked and attired only in a grey wool jumper which was draped casually across one shoulder. He'd had the lean muscularity of a dancer, observable in acute detail, as he wore nothing else. "He is truly a legend," sighed Ana, our gracious interpreter, appreciatively. "They've tried every way to give him housing, feed him, clothe him: he won't have it. He walks the streets here

and he's famous." We both watched him ambulate down the sidewalk, his perfect buttocks gleaming pleasantly in the afternoon sun. I daren't even snap him with my fun camera. He deserved more respect than that.

After a day of gawping at the cloudy outlines of Rio from our cable-car, we spent the following afternoon taking pictures of locally painted graffiti. Jeff Nuttall, a friendly sort of guy from New York joined Ana and me for a touch of sightseeing. We breezed back into Leopoldina Station for business hour, but Ana had left her purple paper ID bracelet in the bin or something. She suggested that we enter from the rear of the building. She told the parking attendants that we needed to pick up our van.

Feeling in a holiday mood, we decided to celebrate with a bit of a smoke. The area looked deserted. We sat down on some concrete benches and proceeded to relax. It wasn't long before an unseen figure marched in from left stage, like a Jerry Bruckheimer extra. Yes, it was a cop. Barking like a junkyard dog, the geezer was obviously trying to terrorize us. He saw that Ana was the only person in the group who understood his tirade, so he focused on her. She turned to me and whispered that we were fucked. The station was apparently on Federal ground and we were fair game, as he saw it. He had no evidence, but he made a great play of sniffing Jeff's paw, and then handing the offending mitt to me to do the same.

It was all very badly written, I thought to myself, but then I was also staring at tomorrow's potential headlines in the Northants Post, which featured Alan with blue veins throbbing in his forehead. I was wrangling with a crude projection of what kind of instinctual mess this cop's head was in and I thought Mad Dog. Mustn't play Keep away. Don't run. Don't giggle. Meanwhile, Jeff was wriggling beside me like Ben Stiller camping it up in a frothy Hollywood farce. "Are we done here?" he honked, as poor Ana began to puddle up. "Shut up and look scared," I offered. Luckily, a sensible little waif named Andrea Doyle came sashaying in, and saved our quaking bums, or rather Ana's, as she was the person who was getting the blackmail demand.

- 2: Brazil's self-declared Walt Disney of Comix
3: Rodrigo, the shy organizer of the whole RioCon2010
4: One of hundreds of hilltop favelas, in Rio and in Salvador
5: Naked nymphs of the Horticultural Gardens





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All great fun, especially considering I had a panel discussion coming up in eleven minutes to get through, where I had to remember to call Kevin and Paul by their right names. I only messed up twice.

The next day was Saturday and we had tickets to the local Carnival practice, via the beautiful Edna, our cultural envoy. This year's colours are green and pink. We whirled, sweated, danced and boggled. Toward 6am, it was rumoured that the French guy who looked like Jack Nicholson in our crowd, had gone off with wriggly Jeff, Grampas (a local well thought-of cartoonist) and G's pretty actress girlfriend Carolina, to the beach, where Frenchie jumped into the reasonably tepid Atlantic, and came out not only sans espadrilles, but sans culottes as well. Poor Carolina! The story brings to mind the tale about the Frenchie who washed up on the beach and turned out to be an orangutan and was promptly hanged by the English...

I had two precious days left to explore the mysteries of my most personal destination, Salvador, Bahia, home of the Candomblé religion, and the African traditions of the Yoruba people. Ana very kindly agreed to accompany me. By early Monday morning we were driving to our little hotel, past what looked to be a former paradisaal beachfront. There were still patches of white sand here and there, under the palm trees, but it was evident that poor Salvador, like Rio, had been ravaged by industrial mining. Huge ragged tracts of sand and arable soil had been scooped out of the land to feed the so-called civilised world's endless greed for gold, precious gems and useful ores.

The now familiar sight of the sprawling favelas was the only homely thing about this rather depressing landscape. An emerald sea, so transparent from the plane, also revealed large, murky patches of oil and other industrial effluents. But, of course, unlike North American waters, Brazil as a country has no ecological redress for the sins piled upon her land and people.

Which leads me to the real story I wish to tell... We drove to the main square of town; the place where all the sullen, pasty tourists go to haggle a bargain from so-called "picturesque"

locals: the Baianas, dressed in bright turbans of twisted calico, spotless in starched, flounced skirts who stand in groups or alone, their smiling features accented in complementary eyeshadow and lipstick. These are women who work every day in the hot sun, being friendly to grunting strangers, serving homemade food to out-of-towners who barely thank them or even look up from their parcels to say "Bom dia".

We visited the Candomblé shop and the striking lady there told us helpful things about the gods I enquired about. In Portuguese, of course. I would not have been able to glean a thing without Ana's kindly and informed presence throughout my whole stay in Brazil. We were no better or worse than any vacationers in someone else's patch. I asked politely, through Ana, if it was possible to perhaps attend a Candomblé ceremony. We were told politely that it was the month of the Dead, and so no ceremonies were taking place.

We meandered on for a bit. The afternoon sun was so hot that we noticed several dogs lying prostrate on the paved cobblestones, apparently not breathing. Cats still wandered in the heat, emaciated and looking for shade. The only truly grand structure on the square was the Third Church of São Francisco, built when the Portuguese first took Brazilian trees and independence away from the Indians in the mid-1500s and erected a grandiose gold temple



9

to their own morose brand of self-righteous, bullying morality. One which, of course, the Brazilians paid for with their lifeblood, culture and environment. But what good were we to the good people of Salvador? In two days we could buy a few trinkets, pay for a bit of local food, pick up a few discs of indigenous music and piss off back home to complain about the heat. We returned to our hotel feeling like we were holidaying in someone else's hell.

Ricky Goodwin, one of our gracious hosts at the con had a friend in Salvador, Caô Gomez, a very talented political artist who works on a local paper. Caô kindly took us on a tour of the Salvador that he knows, after Ana and I had been having quite a different day from the



7



10



8

6: Out building on mansion property near the Gardens.

7: An outdoor toy shop made ingeniously from household rubbish

8: Last photo I took before our bust

9: Andrea Doyle and Jeff Nutall

10: Black and white Carnival shot



15



11



13



12



14



the previous. We went out with a bag of various items that I'd brought with me from England. We went back to the Candomblé shop, where I bought a beautiful figure of the goddess Nanã. I brought out an ocean-coloured scarf and gave it to the nice lady who had explained some of the mysteries of the religion to us. She held the scarf to her face and thanked me earnestly, understanding my desire to thank her genuinely for her help.

Outside, Ana had attempted to snap a picture of a group of Baianas as they stood talking on the corner opposite. "No, no, no", said one of them, "You cannot take our pictures without paying us. We don't stand out here for our fun," she said, in Portuguese. "Ten reals." She gestured at Ana's bag. Ana paid her. Just then, a beautiful Baiana on her own came up to me. "You can photo me," she said in English. "I work alone. Two reals." Ana looked at me and said, "I think I have found the right little boy." She smiled at a child wearing green-framed sunglasses and asked his mother if he would like an underwater fun camera. She explained how it works to the mother, who smiled, and we scurried off to look for a place to eat.

"Lady, lady," the pretty Baiana called after me, "You don't have to pay me, I will pose for you for free." She smiled with kindness, and in the background we could see the other ladies smiling at us as well. We shared out the rest of the little gifts in our bag and moved on intoliterally a different realm altogether. Why should travel always be about being on the take?

Caõ took us to a part of Salvador that I would guess most tourists will never see. A genuine market for magical ritual objects. In the middle of nowhere, under a burning afternoon sun, we parked outside what looked like a makeshift depot piled high with plastic bottles of drink, bags of cornflour, melons and greens. Under a sizeable canopy of dark-stained bamboo thatchwork was a long tarmac throughway lined on both sides with stands watched over by African locals who looked at us with frank suspicion. Cages of crowded chickens were in stacks in front of most of the stalls. The smell of their fear was overpowering. Mind you, they weren't any more miserable than the chickens on your average battery farm, it's just that we don't tend to visit our Sunday dinner while it's

still involved in the desperate battle to survive, do we?

Caõ took us to an outdoor café afterwards, where we met two men who put on the Yemanjá festival each year, where gifts are laid upon the sea for the beautiful goddess of the ocean. I can't possibly tell you everything I saw and experienced while I was in this mysterious country, but I have learned that, as a traveller, you only receive with your heart what you invest with your heart.

Melinda Gebbie



- 11: Ladies in orange dressed as Baianas
 12: Glamorous couple close-up smiley
 13: Frenchie in sunglasses, Grampàs and Carolina
 14: Group of Baianas in Salavador
 15: Neneh and Ana Alexandrino, my guide

DATE ^{WITH} IKEA

By JOSIE LONG (who is CLEVER because she makes REFERENCES to PAVEMENT)

I promise this is not representative of what we'll do on future dates!



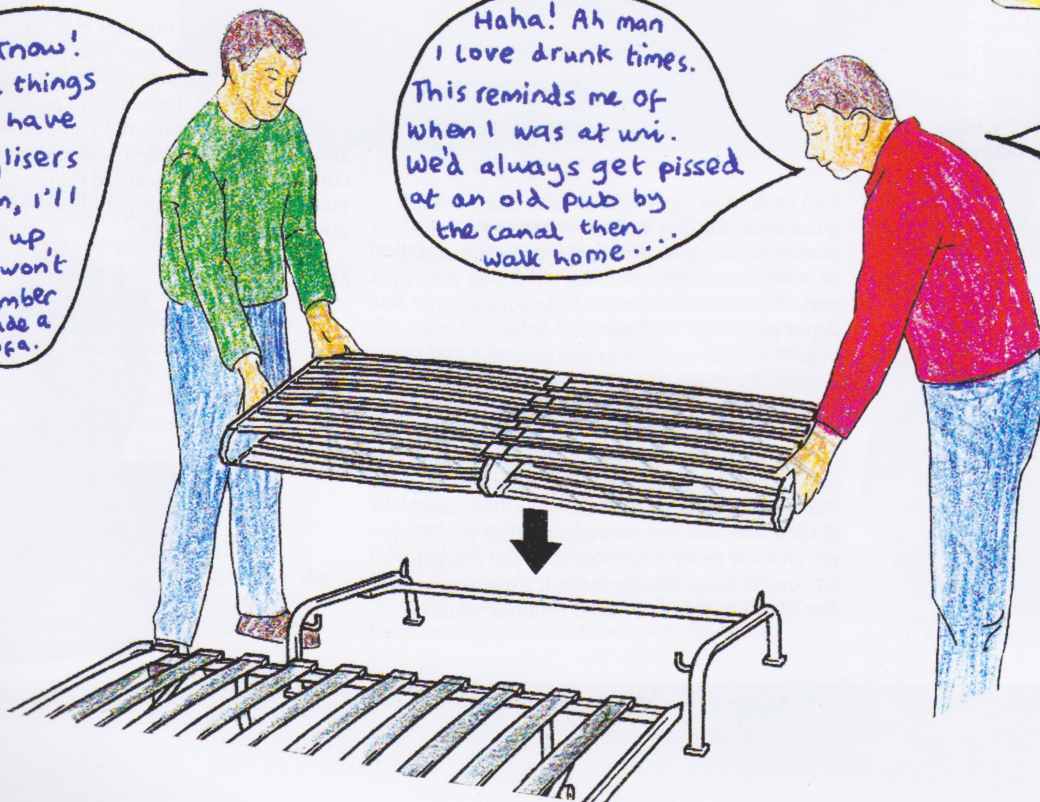
Ha!
It's ok baby. I owe you something after that dinner, it was lovely. I can't believe we had 3 bottles of red though!



I know! These things should have breathylisers on them, I'll wake up, and I won't remember I made a sofa.

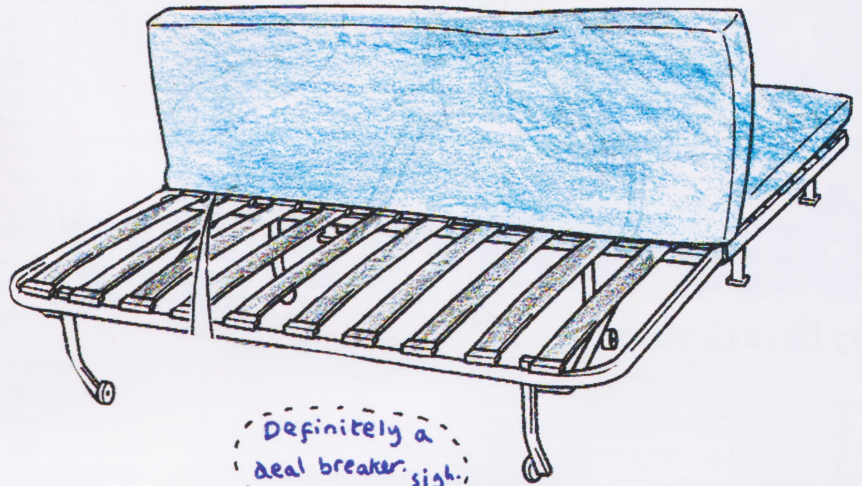
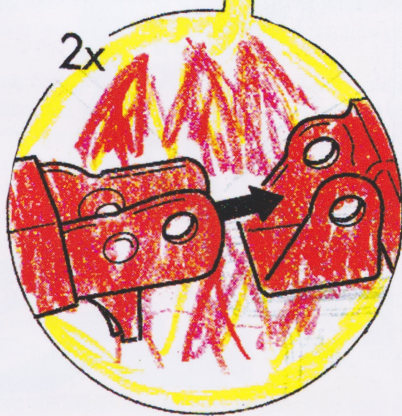
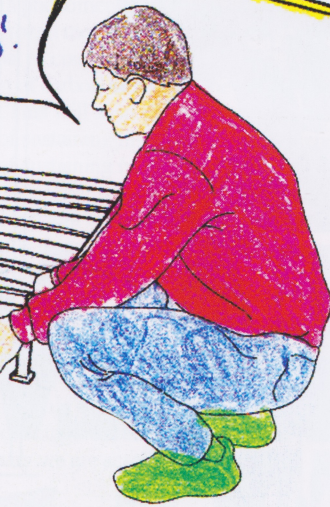
Haha! Ah man I love drunk times. This reminds me of when I was at uni. We'd always get pissed at an old pub by the canal then walk home....

and this old boy, this old tramp lived in a tent by there and hed always come out of it and chase us, shouting all this mad shit!

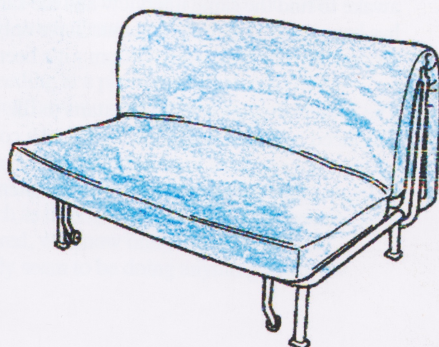
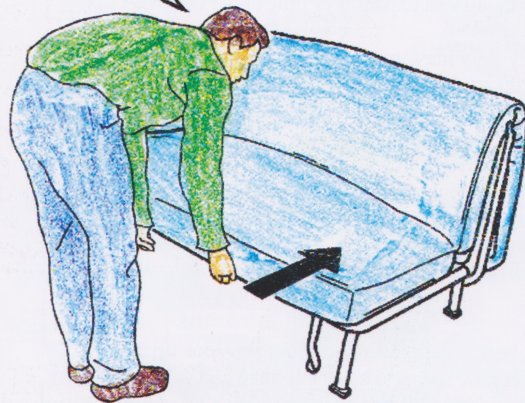


Haha!
Did he scare
you?

No! Well a bit! And then one night in the summer
we were leaving the pub and he was all shut up in there,
passed out and we took turns stamping on it, then
mike (you remember mike?) set the front of it on fire
and it went up like a
christmas pudding!



Definitely a
deal breaker, sigh.



**THE
END.**

THE ECO CHAMBER BEER

One cell of a guy

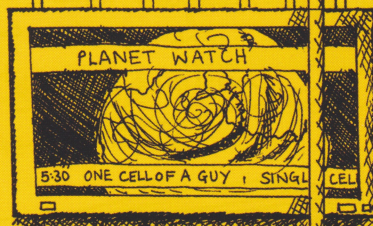
by Dave Hamilton

Imagine you are a being for whom life moves incredibly slowly. So slow in fact, that four billion years for us humans would feel like just 24 hours to you. Perhaps you are an incredibly slow being in a culture remarkably like ours; it might sound implausible but does make explaining vast expanses of time rather easy.

So, as this incredibly slow life form, you decide to go on a 24-hour, epoch-stretching drinking binge. It's New Year on your slow-moving planet and you intend to celebrate. You roll up at a bar on New Year's Eve at 12 midnight, a good 24 hours before the clocks are set to strike and herald in the New Year. You notice a screen is showing a rolling news programme called 'Planet Watch'. All that seems to be showing on the screen is a planet of newly formed rock, inhabitants of which will later call Earth. Not much seems to be happening on the surface cam down on earth - the planet looks pretty hostile.

You sink your first beer slowly (even for you) - you look up at the screen; the planet now seems to have solidified and water flows over the surface. You find a newspaper to kill a bit of time, it's still the small hours of the morning and the bar is all but empty, there's only you and a pale, unfriendly barman in a faded t-shirt.

After two hours of crosswords, sudokos and another beer you gaze back up at the screen, you notice a clock on the corner reads 3.12am. At last there seems to be something happening on the surface cam. Something seems to be swimming about in the water- well, floating at least - and it kind of looks alive. The miserable barman has the sound turned down on the TV so he can read his book. You approach him to ask to turn it up; he shakes his head and lifts up his hand, not moving his eyes up from the page. You slump back down in your seat, defeated.



You strike up a conversation with an old guy who's just wandered in - it's 3.44am. A newsflash appears on the screen, 'LIFE MAKES ENERGY FROM THE SUN' - there's some expert talking in the studio about how monumental this is for the life of the planet. You miss most of what's being said as the old guy seems intent on telling you all the brands of cigarettes he's ever smoked and how their packet designs have changed over the years.

At 5.20am you look up and the screen reads 'ONE CELL OF A GUY'; the bar staff has now changed over; the sound has been turned up once again. You watch for a while as an expert explains how there is bacteria on the new planet.

Nothing seems to happen for hours and the news programme keeps repeating the same footage over and over. The same tired interview with the same scientist plays again and again. It gets to the point where you can repeat it word for word, which you do to anyone who walks in the bar - this doesn't make you very popular, and by now you're quite drunk. It gets to lunch time and the screen is still showing the same footage - nothing has happened. By 3pm you are really drunk and you fall asleep in a quiet corner. You awake to find the same interview and the same footage - nothing has happened. You think you must have only dozed off for a second but the clock reads 7.30pm - it's been the same for hours!

The evening begins and the bar starts to fill. By now you are shit-faced and you order some food and a coffee - the food and caffeine sobers you a little and gives you just about enough clarity to focus again on the screen. It's a little after 9pm and the planet looks frozen.



It's now 9.07. The planet thaws - it looks like things have finally changed. Something with more than one cell is wandering the earth - animal life has begun.

As you sink another couple of beers the night really begins - you get lost in conversation. Somehow, despite the amount of alcohol in your system, you have command of the table you've been sat at all day and all night and the time just flies. 'IT'S A RAT RACE - THE FIRST MAMMALS ARE HERE' flashes on the screen but by now you're caught up in the bar, singing away with your new-found friends. Out the corner of your eye you see at 11.40pm dinosaurs have become extinct. 'God, that seemed quick' you think to yourself as the jukebox plays your favourite song.

The countdown to the New Year begins. It's 11.59 - you catch your last glimpse of the rolling news: 'MAN APPEARS' it reads. The clocks strike midnight - the planet is bang up to the modern age and you're hugging complete strangers. You never get to see what happens next as someone turns the TV off.

What a creature like this could observe on our planet is very difficult for us to imagine - whole species would come and go in a blink of an eye. Human life would barely register; 'civilization' as we know it would have only existed for a fraction of a second.

What is clear from seeing the world on this time scale is just how long life remained as single-cell life forms. The earth has been dominated by single-cell life forms for over 3 billion years. For any observer this would have been pretty dull. In the vast scheme of things animal life is really very recent, very newly evolved. Some could argue that despite our complexity we are still very much like our unicellular ancestors. We do share a lot of their DNA and it is thought that we carry 10 times more bacterial cells than human cells. That is, we are host to countless bacteria in our guts, on our skin and in every colonisable part of our body. Even our human cells have parts, or organelles, still very much like ancient bacteria.

What's more our habits as a species are in a way very much like much similar organisms. Bacteria and viruses tend to cluster around a food source, exploit it, breed like mad, exhaust it and then die or move on. Humans, as Agent Smith in *The Matrix* put it "multiply, and multiply, until every resource is consumed. The only way for you (humans) to survive is to spread to another area."

History is littered with this kind of behaviour. Consider the story of Easter Island. Its inhabitants flourished and built up a complex and ordered society. However, they were not a society with much forethought - they stripped the once forested island of trees for fuel and building materials, and to aid the building of the island's characteristic stone heads. This exposed the island to sea winds and not only eroded farmland, it also prevented their only means of escape from the impoverished landscape.

Take a look at a city from the air and you can see once again our bacteria-like behaviour in action. Most cities began by clustering around where food would have entered the city - London growing up around the Thames being the prime example.

This has changed in recent years as oil has become our main resource. We rely on it and other fossil fuels for almost all facets of life. Most importantly our food system heavily relies on fossil fuels, especially oil, and it is running out.

Just like bacteria we are breeding at a phenomenal rate but unlike these single-cell life forms we have nowhere to move to once all the resources have gone.

We Homo sapiens, the only bi-pedal great apes, are capable of predicting future events such as these. We know that our days of limitless energy are numbered; we know oil is coming to an end yet at present we don't really seem to be doing anything about it.

The burning of fossil fuels goes on unabated, changing the environment beyond measure, putting our very existence as a species at stake. One scenario predicted by climate scientists suggests a phenomenon known as runaway climate change. This predicts frozen methane - usually locked up in the oceans or in the permafrost of countries such as Siberia - will defrost, compounding the action of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere on the earth's temperature. This will send temperatures soaring far higher than that capable of sustaining life or, at least, far higher than temperatures capable of sustaining multi-cellular life.

Archaea - ancient bacteria-like life - has been found in the most inhospitable parts of the globe: in glaciers, in the hot vents of the ocean floor and even in volcanoes.

The planet was theirs for 3 billion years, and if we continue the way we are it looks like it might be theirs again in the not-so-distant future. Perhaps they've been in waiting for an idiotic species such as ours to appear to manipulate the planet and reset evolution back to their advantage? Let's face it, there are not many other rational reasons why we are act the way we do.

However, I'd like to think, we ARE more evolved than bacteria and we DO have our own will. I'd also like to think evolution is set to play out to produce even more complex life on the planet, life beyond the current limits of our imaginations. But in order for this to happen we have to stop acting like our ancient single-cell ancestors and make the future of this planet a multi-cellular one.





THE GODS

by Margaret Killjoy

Anyone who claims to know much about the gods of the trash is lying. The lore regarding these deities is obscure and has largely been fabricated. This article is, of course, as guilty as any other.

But humans evolved to be scavengers, and we've been pantheists and polytheists a lot longer than we've been atheists. Metaphorical or not, there are gods of refuse and waste. Their whim determines when and what a scavenger may eat.

In the civilized world, we're offered an order, a consistency in life that one rarely gets outside of polite society. It's also probably why so many of us are so bored and depressed. At the risk of sounding banal, civilization is god to most people these days; it is the single provider of all of their needs. It's the illusory force that people have chosen to sink their faith into.

It's fascinating to watch the atheist veneer peel away from people who choose or are forced to live off the excess of society. An ironic superstition turns to half-earnest prayer within months. Ask most of us: whether or not we actually believe in the gods of the trash is immaterial. We still worship them.

There are roughly four categories of these gods:

The Major Pantheon control vast and popular domains. For example: Rag is the god of sketchy, expired food; her sister Celioia is the god of dumpstered food that is indistinguishable from store-bought. The gods of the Minor Pantheon are more specialized: Bacchus, the god of wine (and all scavenged intoxicants); Abuela, the goddess of antiques. The Fairies are concerned only with very specific things: Pizza Bones, the fairy of pizza crust; Snipe, the fairy of half-smoked cigarettes. And finally, there are the gremlins who control individual dumpsters and refuse depositories.

With the space available in this column, I'll discuss a few of these specific deities. Bear in mind that each deity is known by a thousand names to a thousand different scavengers.

There are monotheists who claim that one God controls the whole of the trash. This is, of course, utter nonsense.

Name: Ettin

Major Pantheon

Sphere of Influence: Shadows, protection from the law

Followers: All but stupid scavengers attempt to appease Ettin, but he is particularly worshipped by immigrants, fugitives and runaways.

Description: Ettin is a three-headed giant. One head is benevolent and helps people escape the law for ethical reasons, one head simply enjoys misleading and confounding the police, and the third head is malevolent. This third head (referred to in hushed tones as "the third head of Ettin" or simply "Malevolence") is usually asleep, but is woken by loud noises and bright lights. Most people attempt not to rouse

this third head, but it's possible to win it over to one's side through acts of sheer bravado: Malevolence has been known to occasionally spare the most brazen of dumpster-divers, like those who have picnics in dumpsters or who scavenge in broad daylight on busy streets.

Mantra: "May Malevolence sleep."

Rituals: Many who seek to appease Ettin wear a vial around their neck of a tincture of valerian or lavender that has been prepared under the new moon. Others burn police in effigy, but this sometimes provokes wrath instead.

Name: Pigeon

Major Pantheon

Sphere: Freegan food

Followers: Freegans, omnivores, pretty much everyone but vegans

Description: Pigeon manifests as a pigeon that does not cast a shadow and leaves no footprints. Many believe that Pigeon is the original god of the trash and hatched every other from her eggs. Specifically, followers of Pigeon will often refer to the vegan god Keine as "Pigeon's shadow".

Rituals: One ritual that is almost universal among Pigeon's followers (and nearly all dumpster divers) is that of leaving a few containers of choice food behind a dumpster after large scores. Another common ritual is the painting of an initiate's face with the blood of scavenged meat after their first dive.

Shrine: Shrines to Pigeon are quite varied. Some choose to spraypaint the likeness of a pigeon under bridges, others taxidermy roadkill pigeons, and some build elaborate miniature villages with the wrappers of dumpstered candy.

Symbol: an F, sometimes circled.

Name: Keine

Major Pantheon

Sphere: Vegan food

Followers: Vegans, Food Not Bombs cooks

Description: Keine manifests as a pure white light. Followers believe that, in addition to food, Keine grants wisdom, health, and eternal youth. Keine's influence has grown greatly in the past decade or so. Thanks to Keine's blessing and contrary to the misinformation spread by agents of Pigeon, it is quite possible to live and be healthy by only eating trash without animal ingredients.

Rituals: The breaking of eggs found in the dumpster pleases Keine, as does the distribution of PETA propaganda. (I will not make the claim that PETA is actually an occult organization dedicated to spreading Keine's influence and increasing the god's power. PETA has powerful wizards lawyers who would take notice of such a casting back of the veil.)

Shrine: A follower's pure body is itself a shrine to Keine.



Symbol: A "V", often circled.

Name: Abuela
Minor Pantheon

Sphere of Influence: Vintage, valuable, and sentimentally valued trash

Followers: Old-timey punks, librarians, tinkers, steampunks

Description: Abuela is described as a kind old woman with a beautiful smile and eyes that are lost to wrinkles. She is easy to please, but hard to find. She takes pride in finding just the right person to give any particular artifact to. She is known to smile particularly upon those who practice the art of gifting, those who try to find the right home for every object and are not selfish.

Rituals: The most common ritual is to write a letter about one's life and place it in a mailbox with no return address and addressed only to "Abuela." The more dedicated followers will also burn mothballs in antique metal bowls filled with lighter fluid.

Name: Nomicon
Minor Pantheon

Sphere: Secrets, passwords, diaries, data, DIY porn

Followers: Hackers, FOUND Magazine, anthropologists, police investigators

Description: Nomicon manifests as goat eyes that glint from the shadows, reflecting light. A prankster, he is fickle — even to his most devoted followers — and delights in revealing information to the worst possible people.

Rituals: Those who seek to protect themselves from Nomicon burn every note, often grinding the ashes in a mortar and pestle. Those who seek Nomicon's favor, however, show their commitment and faith by burning pages from dumpstered journals without reading the contents first. Others will get Nomicon's name tattooed and immediately tattoo a solid black coverup — these thick black armbands are a telltale signs of a follower.

Shrine: A hard light shone on a table, with an icon or book placed just outside the circle of light.

Symbol: A solid black square with a black X imposed on top of it, visible only by the difference in gloss or thread.

Name: Bacchus
Minor Pantheon

Sphere: Dumpstered alcohol and recreational drugs

Followers: Drunk punks, bums, some hipsters

Description: Despite the decline of polytheism worldwide, Bacchus—the Roman god of wine—is still worshipped by a few sects of homeless drunks who call upon the god to provide free alcohol. There are rumors, too, of cultists who trace their worship back through the millennia, but these are most likely fabrications.

Rituals: One common rite is the spilling of the first sip of a beer onto the ground, but the hedonistic orgy of proper bacchanalia is not unheard of in squatted warehouses and under bridges by the railroad tracks.

A ritual to free oneself from the thrall of Bacchus is to find the energetic center of his power (where the worshippers congregate), circle it counterclockwise twelve times (a shopping cart filled with dumpstered knick-knacks can help), and then build an altar. This breaks the spell and allows one to leave for good.

Shrine: Worshippers will leave their empty paraphernalia placed in heaps or elaborate patterns.

Name: Xafairex
Fairy

Sphere: Soda, candy, and juice.

Followers: Straight-edgers, teetotalers

Description: Xafairex, alternately known as XfairyX or the Soda Fairy, is the spirit who manifests to help sober scavengers be indulgent without resorting to drugs. Some followers of Xafairex believe that she was the original god of indulgence—that she had been a benevolent force that allowed humanity release from stress without falling into depravity—but that her throne was usurped by Bacchus millennia ago and she was demoted to fairy status.

Xafairex's strongest ally among the gods is Keine, the major pantheon god of vegan food.

Rituals: Stating one's commitment to the ideals of sobriety to all passers-by is a common ritual, but Xafairex is known in particular to respond well to those who destroy any intoxicants they may run across in the trash.

Mantra: "Ascendancy."

Name: The Rust Fairy
Fairy

Sphere: Rusty things

Followers: Crusty travelers, jewelers and me.

Description: The Rust Fairy places rusty washers and even neater things into gutters for her followers to find. The surest way to keep in the Rust Fairy's grace is to walk, rather than bicycle or drive, as much as possible. The surest way to fall out of favor is to pocket metal items that aren't yet rusty.

Rituals: A follower of the Rust Fairy keeps a pouch (if a traveler) or organized drawers (if a house punk) to hold what is referred to as one's "treasure." Sorting — or simply dumping out and looking through — one's treasure helps keep the Rust Fairy present in one's thoughts.

Symbol: A pendant made from rusted parts.



STITCH THIS!

METROPOLIS MAKE DO & MEND

presents

A CUTTING & STICKING, STOCKING STUFFING SPECIAL FEATURE

*EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE DISTOPIAN SEX-BOT MADE FROM THE SORT OF THINGS
THAT ANY SELF-RESPECTING POST-CIVILIZATIONIST SHOULD HAVE LYING AROUND THEIR BUNKER...*

Jesus H. Kirstie. The Christmas craft onslaught is almost curing me of my haberdashery habit this year.

Screw you Kirstie* and your beautiful home and lovely selection of coats!

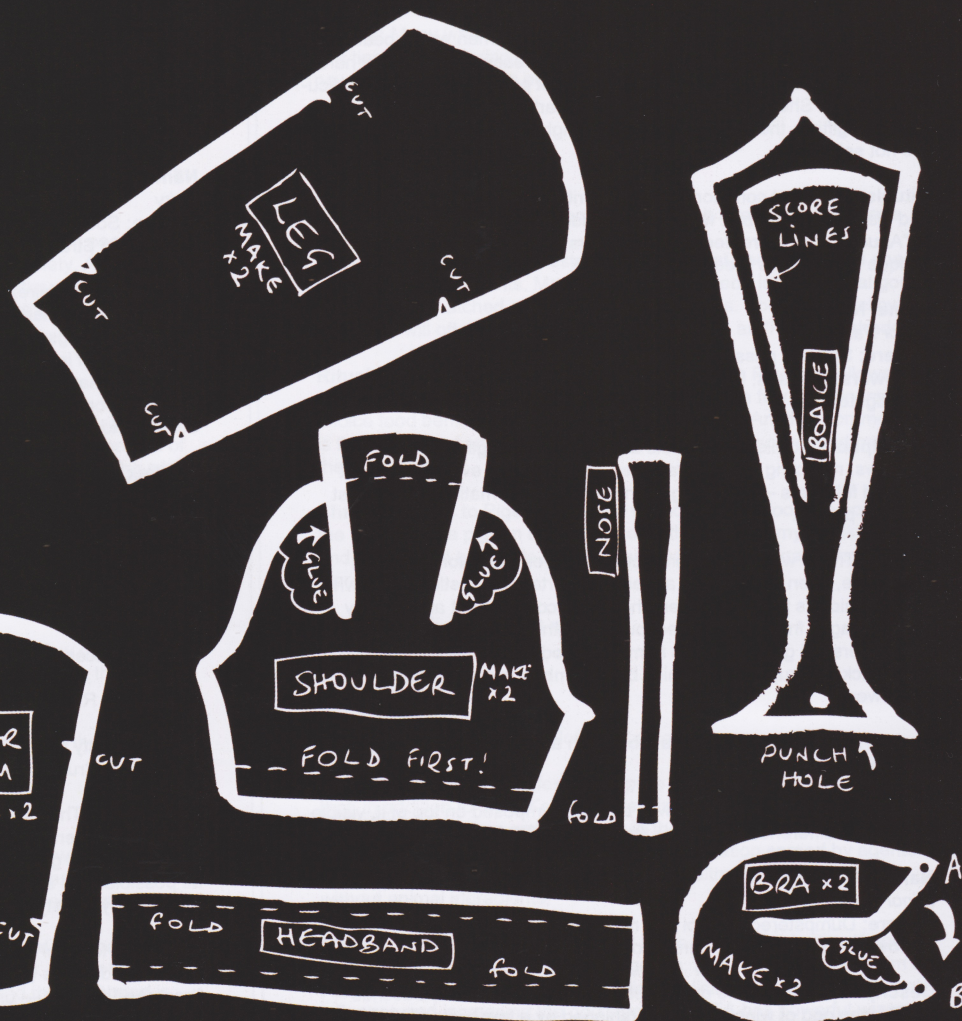
Christmas is not about crocheted socks and advent calendars made out of miniature up-cycled galvanized buckets. It is about feeling all of your years as your bones freeze, spending too much time with your family and hitting the LBV till the whole shiny, shouty nonsense goes away. Here's a project to see you through the freeze, you might want to make it out of matchsticks or some bread that you've chewed up instead. I'm opting for Barbie abuse and gaffa tape.

This is not one for people who aren't allowed sharp things...

*of course if you would like to adopt me or be my best friend and invite me to move in with you I will. I love you really, I'm just doing it for the punters

YOU WILL REQUIRE...

- 1 BARBIE DOLL
- 3 FIZZY DRINK CANS
- CHROME ACRYLIC SPRAY PAINT
- SILVER SEWING THREAD
- UHU GLUE
- NON-PRECIOUS SCISSORS
- A POKING DEVICE (bradle / stitch ripper)
- SILVER GAFFA TAPE
- POPPERS OR EYELETS
(or similar robot type glue-on bits)
- TIME AND SPACE



BLUEPRINTS... Cut each piece out along the fat lines. Dotted lines are to be folds. Good luck.

LETS DO THIS...

First give Barbie a hair cut, get as much of it off as you can. Then spray her all over with the chrome, this in itself gives a pretty awesome effect. Give her a second coat if she needs it, obviously do it somewhere ventilated and let it dry before manhandling for a perfect finish.

Next trace the pattern onto greaseproof paper. Prep two of your tin cans by cutting off the top and bottom (poke a hole and cut round with the scissors) and down one side to leave a sheet of thin metal. Cut the pieces out, be really careful them edges is sharp!
Make sure you cut two of all the things that she has two of.

Next mark in the embossed lines by pressing hard with a pencil onto the back of the metal (put it on a sheet of thick card or something else you can press into). Also make the hole at the bottom of the bodice and cut the notches into the pieces as marked, these are to give the thread something to catch onto so only need to be little.

The shoulder pieces and bra all need to be glued and clamped till they are dry so make these up first. For the bra align point A over point B and glue it down with a dob of glue. Do the other half as a mirror image of the first one. To make the shoulders fold up the hem and then bend in the two side pieces and fold the centre flap over them to create a boxy shape, glue and clamp as before.

For each piece of armour - try it against your doll and trim if it needs it. Bend the piece to fit, glue it to the doll and then use a small amount of matching thread to tie it in place, use the notches to make sure the threads stay together.

Finish off the knee caps with the bit off the ring pull, it works a treat.

Fit, bend and attach the 'Inner Arms' as before, then take the 'Outer Arm' pieces, make the fold and then wrap the metal around a pencil to make a nice cylinder, add this second layer over the first and glue into place.

Make a bald-cap out of strips of silver gaffer tape applied straight to the head papier-mache style. Take the metal nose strip, bend the nose-end under and glue the piece to the centre of her head and forehead.
Fold the alice band as shown and glue into place.

Add grommets, poppers, left over fuses anything electrical looking can be glued onto the robot. Three on each thigh, over the ears and on top of her head.

Finally take the last can and this time just remove one end. Cover the whole thing with tape and perch Barbie on top.
You can also add fairy lights and wires for the full effect!

Between the mind that plans and the hands that build there must be a Mediator, and this must be the heart.



THE URBAN GUERRILLA GARDENER'S TIPS FOR AUTUMN AND WINTER TYPE STUFF



NEVER WASTE FOOD. SHARE IT!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS

NOR DO I BUT THANK YOU DEAR

PICK THINGS BEFORE THEY ROT.

THE WINTER CAN BE GLOOMY AND GET YOU DOWN. GARDENING IS GOOD THERAPY. JUST THINK OF HOW WONDERFUL IT WILL ALL BE IN THE SPRING ☺

PULL OUT ALL YOUR OLD PLANT MATTER. (WITH LOVE!)

COME ON. YOU'LL LIVE AGAIN, FRIEND.

PLACE ALL THIS INTO BUCKETS, BOWLS OR POTS AND PANS. THE RAIN WILL DO THE REST AND TURN IT INTO LIQUID PLANT FOOD. WHICH IS TOP NOTCH AND IS BETTER THAN ANY THAT YOU CAN BUY. (BOTTLE IT)

PHEW



IT'S NICE TO BE NICE ♡

IT STINKS
BUT IS WORTH
THE EFFORT

DONT FORGET THE
BIRDS. THROW OUT
ANY SCRAPS FOR THEM

START THINKING
ABOUT HOW TO PROTECT
YOU PLANTS AGAINST FROST.
COVER ANY UNUSED LAND
TO SAVE DIGGING IT AGAIN

HEY FROSTY
DO ONE

OUCH

MOUND UP SOIL TO
COVER PLANTS UP TO
THEIR NECKS. COVER
WITH POTS, PAPER
BAGS OR COW SHIT

SORRY
MATE

NO
NOT THE
BAG

NO
NOT THE
COW
SHIT

OY

GARDENING DOES NOT STOP DURING THE WINTER.

COLLECT FALLEN LEAVES
FOR MULCH. IT'S GOOD
FUN AND YOU GET FUNNY LOOKS

START PLANTING BULBS FOR
THE SPRING. PRUNE OLD
STUFF

KEEP WARM!
AN ILL GARDENER
IS NOT GOOD!
THERE IS NO EXCUSE TO BE
OUTSIDE. DONT ROT
INDOORS.

HAT

THICK SOCKS

GLOVES

COLD BUT BORN
READY

UNLESS YOU
HAVE A
HOUSE TOY
WHO LOVES
YOU.

THAT'S
A
GOOD
EXCUSE!

I LOVE
YOU NURSE

OH
YEAH

EAT TO THE BEAT

by Wendi Jarrett

ROYAL PUMPKIN RISOTTO

This is another great dish that can use some of the more interesting and tasty pumpkins that are now available in Northampton. Adapted from a recipe by Claudia Roden, I sometimes use the Quenby Hall Stilton from just across the border in Leicestershire instead of grated parmesan. It's a lovely dish to which you can add some wild mushrooms to make it a special occasion dish.

INGREDIENTS

serves 4

- 2 tbsp rapeseed oil
- 350g risotto rice
- 300g approx (1/2) Crown Prince pumpkin - washed and cubed
 - 1/4 pint milk
 - 1 medium onion - chopped
 - 2 cloves of garlic - crushed
- 4 fresh sage leaves or 1 1/2 tsp dried sage leaves
- 1 ltr vegetable or chicken stock or water
- freshly ground black pepper and a good grind of rock salt
 - 100g Quenby Hall Stilton - cubed small

METHOD

- Wash, remove seeds and stringy centre, and cube the pumpkin. In a frying pan with a tablespoon of oil, sauté the pumpkin briefly and cover with milk. Simmer gently until the pumpkin is just under tender (approx 10 minutes) but still firm.
Remove from heat and set aside.
- Place stock in the large saucepan and bring to boil, reduce heat and leave to simmer on low. You'll be using this shortly.
- In a clean large frying pan, sauté* the onion and garlic for 3 minutes in 2 tbsp of oil, add the risotto rice and stir to coat with oil.
- Add a ladle or so of stock to the rice and stir to incorporate it, stir gently until the liquid is absorbed. Add another ladleful of stock and cook until absorbed, continue like this until the stock is all gone, the rice should be glossy, a little sticky but still have a tiny bit of bite (not soft).
- Stir the fresh sage leaves and the part-cooked pumpkin - cook until the pumpkin is hot. Finally add the crumbled cubes of Stilton cheese.

Cook's Tip

** Instead of frying onions, place them chopped in a microwave-proof bowl with a tsp of rapeseed oil, cover with non-PVC cling film and cook on high for 3 minutes.*

In the autumn, visit Smith's Farm Shop near Chapel Brampton and try a selection of pumpkins and squash, especially the wonderfully sweet and flavoursome 'Crown Prince'.

WENDI'S LUSH FESTIVE PUDDING

I developed this recipe for a cookery course I ran for elder members of Bellinge Community House. Andrea the manager asked if I could create festive dishes for someone living on their own or for a couple, which didn't take too much time, energy (power) or money! She liked me a lot! Anyway, my festive pud uses a lot of ingredients you're likely to have in the kitchen cupboards and fridge around late autumn and it only takes approximately seven minutes to cook.

I've 'supersized it' to feed up to eight, and you can use brandy, rum or even whisky in place of some of the fruit juice to make it a boozier version. After all, it's low fat, and each serving contains at least a good portion of your five-a-day, and it's easier on the digestion than the traditional suet-pud. I'm sure you'll enjoy this - it's a star recipe that I get asked for time and time again. Have a cool yule.

INGREDIENTS

serves 8

- 3 slices of wholemeal/granary bread - whizzed or grated (roughly)
 - 1 large organic carrot - grated
- 1 cup of Crown Prince pumpkin* - peeled and grated
- 1 cup of mixed fruit (previously soaked for a week or more in either apple juice or brandy/sherry mix)**
 - 1 dessertspoon of ground mixed spice
 - 1 tsp of cinnamon
- 1 unwaxed orange - rind grated and juice
- 1/2 unwaxed lemon rind (or use candied citrus peel instead)
 - 1 tsp of fresh root ginger - grated
 - 1 cup of apple juice
- 2 tsp. Mellow Yellow Rapeseed Oil or similar
 - 2 eggs - beaten

METHOD

*** If you haven't had time to soak the dried fruits, put it all in a saucepan and simmer on a low heat for 5 minutes, until the dried fruits are plump. Allow to cool before using.*

- Break up bread into very small pieces or use the big holes of a hand grater, or food processor. Separately do the same with the carrots and pumpkin. All should be quite small. Tip into a large mixing bowl and stir together.
- Add the soaked fruit and all the other ingredients, and mix well.
The mixture should be soggy!
- Press into a lightly oiled pudding basin, cover loosely with non-PVC food wrap (non-PVC cling film). Microwave on half power (450 watts) for 7 minutes.
 - Allow to stand for 2 minutes.
- The pudding will have risen a little. Remove the non-PVC food wrap.
- To serve, invert pudding basin on a plate and remove the pudding.
- You can warm some brandy and drizzle over before setting alight!
 - Serve with crème fraîche, custard or brandy sauce.

For more info on festive cooking on a budget or small festive feasts visit
www.wendijarrett.co.uk

* For Crown Prince pumpkins contact Smiths Farm Shop, nr Chapel Brampton.
Tel: 01604 843206

THE SPINNING DOCTORS

GIVE SOMETHING BACK

BY DR FEELGOOD

It's Christmas, a time to give and receive presents. In our current bleak economic climate a wise man could do his part, give what we can - even our heart...we can always give something. Over the last five issues I have discussed the New Economics Foundation's response to the Foresight Report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing: the five actions we could take as individuals that would improve our well-being.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

Mutual cooperation is associated with a positive response in reward areas of the brain, therefore social cooperation is in itself rewarding. Like all animals, our behaviour is motivated by either obtaining rewards or avoiding punishment. Appropriate stimulation of this reward system, particularly in early life, contributes to gains in cognitive and social functioning critical for the development of mental capital and well-being. Developing our sense of purpose and meaning in society has a significant effect on mental well-being. So, helping, sharing, giving and team-oriented behaviours are likely to be associated with an increased sense of self-worth and positive feelings.

Being involved in social and community life is strongly associated with feelings of happiness and life satisfaction. This reflects a previous comment that it takes a village to raise a child. Children in front of screens, isolated from the social environment are less likely to be able to develop such skills. The good news is that they can get their cognitive behaviour therapy needed for their depression from the computer as well.

Locally, a 'time bank' has been set up where people can give and receive time and skills. For instance, someone with a disability who could not afford to have their house painted, and was feeling oppressed by their dishevelled accommodation, was able to give their skill of being a good talker and providing phone support in exchange

with someone who is good at painting and decorating doing up their house. Someone who was afraid of leaving the house on their own was able to exchange someone to go walking with and provide time by doing ironing for someone else. Notably this time bank was set up within the primary care mental health services and the team have noticed how these social interactions have significantly improved people's mood and well-being, with some being able to decrease medication, but more importantly many finding a new sense of purpose and direction enabling them to find recovery from their distress.

When we are seen to give, it can put others in our debt under an obligation for reciprocity. However if we can give without being seen, then we are empowering others as well as ourselves.

Experiment 1

Why not try putting some research into action? Commit to an extra act of kindness at least once a week over a six-week period and compare your well-being to the previous six weeks. Evidence suggests that notions of 'giving back' to others promote well-being for people of all ages.

Being involved in shared tasks like community service and social life has been shown to be an important predictor of life satisfaction, especially for people who are retired. There is much wasted mental capital of people beyond working age who still have much to give, yet nowhere they feel able to give of their skills. Here lies a real opportunity for communities to come back to life, where older people are given an opportunity to give something back or even "pay it forward".

In the film *Pay it Forward* a 12 year old schoolboy called Trevor decides to help a tramp called Jerry by inviting him home, to help him get back on his feet. His mother is not pleased, but Trevor sticks to his plan. Jerry wants to pay him back, but instead Trevor asks him to 'pay it forward' and to help three other people. This idea seems to go nowhere, but the effect quietly spreads across the nation, eventually bringing about a revolution in many people's lives. We may not see any fruits of our giving, but that does

not stop us experiencing the sense of well-being we get after an act of true giving, done for its own sake and not done so that we get paid back.

William Wilberforce was not only part of the group of people ending the United Kingdom's involvement in the slave trade but was also part of the group that helped set up the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals which, following Queen Victoria's interest, became the RSPCA. Wilberforce put his Christian faith into action. This faith came from reading *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, written by Philip Doddridge while working in the United Reformed Church, Castle Hill, Spring Borough, Northampton. Doddridge's gift of his book went on to influence Wilberforce who went on to influence...? So you never know who you influence - perhaps we could yet develop a social movement of well-being springing from Northampton.

When thinking of how to spend our time we have a choice. We could decide to spend time on narrow inward-looking activities, or activities of giving and sharing which are much more likely to improve our well-being. Not only are they going to develop our personal sense of reward (so we have already been paid back) but these actions also lead to social capital, building stronger relationships around us which are more likely to be protective for us in the future.

Experiment 2

Just give a smile. Interestingly even if you lift your eyebrows and bare your teeth you change your neurotransmitters as your body remembers this as a smile. It's worth trying in front of a mirror - it never fails to make me laugh. Smiles are infectious. They don't cost anything and even if you are just smiling to yourself remember you are lighting up reward centres in your brain. If you smile to others then this lights up their reward centres and so it spreads. Well-being springing from Northampton...

So giving is the last of the five activities that can improve our well-being. Giving and smiling have positive connections with exercise, learning, and taking notice. The next article is on how we can wrap this altogether in a Well-being Recovery and Action Plan.



All Nervy wants for Christmas is YOU.



So it's Christmas again and Nervy wants to know what you want – no, not from Father Christmas – from the NHS. But don't bother thinking too hard just yet, because as far as the NHS is concerned, this year you are probably going to get much the same as you got last year, only quite a lot less of it.

The government has stated there will be a 0.1% increase in funding annually (on a current budget of £104 billion). Good. But wait for it, £15-20 billion in efficiency savings will have to be made. Excuse Nervy, but that seems like a large CUT in funding, so just how is that going to work?

Perhaps there is hope? The government has also decreed that in 2013, GPs will be responsible for commissioning almost all NHS care. That means Nervy and his colleagues will be buying what you want for Christmas 2013 and we've been thinking that we should start asking you to make some decisions now about what that will be.

Cynics will say: the government has given you the poison chalice so you've decided to pass it on to the patients – clever! But that would be cheap – not even worthy of the Daily Mail – because GPs and patients working together are likely to come up with the most rational and practical solutions, and ultimately shouldn't the choice be with the people who use the service? You'll need enough information to make rational decisions and Nervy guesses you'll all have different ideas, and some will be different from the GPs. But tough. We'll have to make some compromises, and if we listen to you, you'll not be justified in coming whingeing back to us!

The first big question is: can we really save money? Getting you involved locally could be a key to this because lots of money is wasted on inappropriate use of services; support for better self-care and maybe even some sanctions could help. A good example is the high level of self-referrals to out-of-hours services including hospitals' Accident and Emergency departments. What would your solution be to this? Direct access to physiotherapy assessment and treatment of minor injuries and back pain could be an option. Do you fancy popping in to a health café for some friendly advice instead of going to the doctor's? Otherwise it's about managing with what we've got, or offering to pay more taxes.

So if there is no more money, what will be the big issues to debate? There are the so-called alternative therapies: although there is little research evidence for many of them, people seem to like them. Secondly, should we pay for some high-cost, high-tech solutions for a few people, or improve more basic services for everyone, or make some services more freely available such as gastric banding for obesity on the basis it could save money in the long run. However, longer-term projects to make the nation healthier may need some fundamental changes in society, which are not just the province of the NHS.

One public debate which Nervy would like to see would be about just how much we are willing to pay to prolong people's lives, and maybe that has to come with a discussion about euthanasia too. It is said that when it's your own mother, partner or child – or yourself – you will think differently from normal. Nervy thinks this is a crazy argument – we need to tell people when they are being irrational and selfish.

This could also be an opportunity to start questioning the sensational headlines that the papers come up with, like this recent stuff about a new drug to treat bowel cancer. Do you want to pay for someone to have his or her life extended by 6 weeks (on average) for £21k? The press somehow imply that without a drug like that, people are going to be heartlessly "left to die". Well, left to die they may be, but it doesn't have to be a heartless experience. As always it's easier to throw money at technology rather than spend some thought and time on people. Nervy's view: these are last-chance drugs with little benefit in real terms, and with the negative value of tending to reinforce denial and postpone acceptance of dying. And how come people start to be so valuable when they are dying, when before being diagnosed we would have let them sleep on the street? But again, what do you think?

Is death such a bad thing? Nervy thinks we have some strange ideas about death – why should we want to avoid it at all cost? Why does being about to die give us a status that we never had up until then, all our lives?

Nervy thinks that these debates could even become the latest must-see reality TV, and the advertising revenue could be used to make up the shortfall in funding the NHS.

Perhaps underlying all these issues, the debates could examine what we believe in and how we form our opinions? *What do YOU believe in?* Will you go to church on Christmas Day? Will you leave mince pies for the reindeer? Will you read your horoscope for the New Year in the papers? Do you believe there won't be any arguments, that Uncle George won't get drunk and that you won't end up in tears?

There are lots of things we like to believe, many things we just don't want to accept. For many of the things we believe in, there is little if any evidence. But if we like to believe it, is that OK? And is it reasonable as a basis for decisions on healthcare funding?

So the debates should be fun, but they should be yours! Nervy wishes you a Merry Christmas and an exciting wait for the 2013 New Year fireworks.



VOLUME N° 7.

NOTES FROM NOHO

PAWPRINTS OF

THE

NOHO



BY MARTIN MARPRELATE

The cold brings some perfect dark for the fox to sit in silently. Curtains are closed on living rooms and back doors. There is no landscape of light in the gardens: trees and walls and bins and emptiness fuse into one chaotic black silhouette and the fox sits somewhere within it, contemplating.

Up is naked sky - beyond the dark scraps of lace that are moonless clouds - but the fox, prince of the night in Noho, does not look up. He knows one glance would snuff out his small sharp mind because there, for anyone that cares to think about it, is all the evidence you need of the limitations of whichever god you follow. Up there, in the space between the sparkles - beyond nothing at all - is where the imagination of gods runs out: the odourless void waiting to claim the bright dust of our bones. A fox has no business thinking of such things, no capacity to weep.

He pads through the gardens of the Bishop's House with his tongue lolling out of a wry, pin-toothed smile. He wants to sit on the gravel and see the churchman look out and up. He wants to see the private doubts on those heavy holy eyes before the curtains close.

"If your god ever comes they won't need you, churchman, and if your god never comes, what are you for, churchman? Ha, but I still need you and the little dish of meaty stuff you put out for the hedgehog. Ha."

The fox whips his tongue round his snout to savour every stolen morsel and sets off, knowing nothing is as cruel as his sense of humour. When beloved stupid hens are discovered in the mornings, blood and feathers exploded around the coop and people cry, "Why, oh why?" it's because it is funny.

"Ha. Vicious boy."

No hens in Noho though. None that he's found anyway. Not yet. Time to go finding. Out of the pooling tree shadow and onto the hardness of the lit street, under the car on one side, a streak of red fur with the white of his tail top following like a blazing fuse as he darts for the embrace of concealment on the other side. His small black heart pounds so hard after the road. A scent yanks his nose down and to the right. The alley.

"Oh. So. Good."

Where is it? Where is it? The fox turns and scans the ground. So strong, it's so strong. It's not just a scent, it's the scent. The elixir. There's not much but it's definitely there. His neck fur prickles a little as he snorts at the pathway. He ignores the ludicrous pomposity of the stale urine messages from dogs.

"Tremble ye who pass this way and know you are in the domain of Mr Tiddles."

It's close, it's there somewhere. It's...



The prick of pain in his wet nose is small but so unexpected that he squeals and jumps back as if bitten. But it's there. The scent is right there and too good not to try for it again. He can taste it all over his tongue even before he finds the needle and begins lapping tentatively. Not fresh. Not much but very real. Blood. People blood. You can't leave precious richness like that lying around... again there is a prick of pain and the fox scrambles back once more. Enough is enough. He snorts. He sneezes.

He's watched them put needles in when they have done it at night, hunching round the nasty little spike like it's some kind of treasure. He's sat silently within a weave of brambles and observed the things people do in alleys to make themselves great. They are great, these people, there is no doubt about that. A drop of their delicious blood is worth the pain.

But the taste is more in his mind than on his tongue now. He coils into the alley shadows and moves on. His heart is drumming.

"I fancy a kill. Something small fallen from a nest, something soft; not properly shut away in its place for the night, that's what I fancy."

Shame on him for wanting greatness too. Maybe wanting it is more human than having it. That smile is back, tongue slung out of his mouth again, licking a breeze that is barely there, his taste buds dazzled by the aromas of the alley. There is always so much to take in.

A twisted tin sits in a bush of weeds with a distant pang of sweet fermentation about it, but it's old and cold. Nothing for his belly here but it does remind him that another darker channel, more thick with weeds, more beyond the light, is about to open up on his left: an alley branching off an alley. The map of smells that guide him through the night matches the world around him. The crowded little house with the tempting people cubs is just over the wall. He sat on top of the wall and looked down at them crying on their rug one afternoon. He spent an age watching their fat little bodies wriggle in the sun trying to work out whether he could drag one away or not. Would his snapping jaw pinch the life from its throat quickly enough or not? Had they been left out to be eaten like the seed for the birds and the rubbish for the rats? Were they an offering from people to his kind, the way people left offerings for the other animals?

This house was full of so many people, stuffed in so many rooms, it must be one of the greatest of all houses and so would surely make the greatest of all offerings. The churchman leaves a small dish outside his big empty palace but this noisy fertile tribe gifts its own cubs to the prince of the night.

It is the memory of that possibility that the fox leaps four times his height to recapture. His claws scuff on the brickwork of the garden wall until he is upon it, looking down with his night eyes, tail flowing and balancing. There is the little house.

There is the grass where the rug was. It is wet with dew now and the people are shut inside or gone.

Occasional wafts of their piss odour move like phantoms in these alleys but the messages in their urine are vague, ashamed, venal, as though they are ignorant of their greatness. Disappointing, really. He would expect better from them. It's easier to move along the top of the wall than through that stench. It is too much like the limitless despair of the sky.

"Ah hello, what have we here?"

The fox stumbles into a halo of light as he skips down into the next garden, a well tended plot. Some brown people live here and one of them is looking out from an upstairs window. He has seen her there before: the girl who is not quite right. Her people keep her in the house, even though she is far too big to be eaten by a rat, cat or fox. The fox has seen her many times watching him, sometimes pointing although her people never come to see what she has seen. He rather fancies she is a little bit in love with him and well might she be, his flash of white chest fur is among the finest you would see on any prince of the night.

He has time, so he sits, flicking his brush from side to side and considers a little serenade for her in the glow from her room.

"There is one of you and one of me, you are the only one that sees..."

Of course he doesn't, in case another fox hears.

His eyes shine back at her, his ears prick up for her and she raises a finger to point like she does but then an unseen, unseeing hand draws the curtains across her smile and the inner light is sliced off. Singing to people? Move on mad fox before some unexpected moron dog comes running at you from a suddenly opened door. There is kindness in the hands of people and it is true they do not rip the throats out of foxes themselves but the killing things buzz round people like flies.

Their dogs, their cars, their guns, their harvesters, the blocked dens with the sleeping death, the wide neat fields with nothing but plants that watch you starve. The bodies pile up around the works of humanity. Thankfully there are still towns like Noho: the last refuge of the wild.

The fox followed the riverbank here with his mother who used to hold him by his neck while his paws paddled in the air. The time came when he needed more food than she could bring so he went finding and tore open the black sacks of gifts people left on their streets.

He knew he was in the right place when he found his first chicken bones. He didn't know exactly what people did to chickens but he was sure they must have suffered. I am among kindred spirits, he had thought. When he went back to the riverbank his mother had moved on and so the great long hunt which is the life's work of a fox began.

He crosses a path and...

"What's that?"

Unusual to see something before he smells it but sometimes the stink of people is so strong in these gardens things can be missed. It's a drip of dark living meat on the flagstone, like a tongue without a mouth, salivating its way towards another leaf.

"One wonders if the stupidity of slugs is as painful for them as it is for me. I can hardly bear it."

The fox places his paw firmly down on the wretched creature and feels it squirm and contract as he tilts his nose towards it, fascinated.

"Why do you ever come off the plants? What is there for you on these cold hard stones? Is the grass always so much greener on the other side? What... is... the rush?"

It is tough and chewy but quite filling and the taste of its witlessness hangs a new smile on the fox's face. He bounds up on to a raised flowerbed and places his forepaws on a birdbath for a drink. The taste of witlessness turns out to be a little bitter tonight. Drink, drink, drink.

Something makes the fox snap his head round towards the next wall. Something makes his hackles rise. Some crease in the air, some whisper from the shadows. A large black cat with a bitten off ear is watching him from on top of the wall, in just the kind of place he might sit and watch.

"Hello what have we here?"

"Hello indeed..."

The fox remains upright, front paws on the birdbath, watching. The cat watches back. Not every cat is big enough to do that. Not every cat is bold enough to do that. This one is.

"That's my birdbath."

The fox remains standing, staring.

"I don't think you understand, I'm in charge of killing things round here."

The fox lashes his tongue round his snout.

"Oh really? In that case I believe I may owe you a slug..."

He drops his forepaws to the ground and sets himself into a semi crouch. Now everyone's spine hair is rising. For the fox the important thing is to get out from under the cat when it leaps. He knows it will leap, the certainty of that is written in the smell of the night and the beating of their hearts. The cat, simply by being above him on the wall, has already won one battle. The cunning feline is more like the fox than either of them care to admit.

For the fox the choice is to move now or not. He is unwilling to show the cat his back by retreating but is even less keen to wait for the claws to come screaming down on him. The plume of his tail flicks with excitement and that proves to be the trigger.

The cat's snarl echoes around the gardens as it launches and the fox collapses sideways, fangs bared and turning as his attacker overshoots. Now, for a moment, the fox is behind the cat and he snaps two or three times at its neck before they are scrambling and scratching and separating more than a leap apart. Both on the grass. Both set to go again, front paws low, hindquarters high. The cat's tail is curving, infatuated with the contest but the fox can think only of what this will cost him. He edges sideways and the cat mirrors his movement, both still poised to attack as they circle.

"You are a toy. You belong to people. If you were free and of the wild you would not waste this energy that could be used for the hunt."

The fox's lips are drawn back to his gums, displaying his killing teeth - bigger than the cat's. A low screech builds in the cat's throat, its good ear and its war-torn ear flush with its skull.

"Your kind don't belong here. You don't understand this place. This is my town, dog-breath. Go back to where you came from."

And then just as the fight is about to begin again there is the sound of a lock clanking and a handle creaking, and the scent of mankind pouring out of an open door. Fox and cat have no idea what to do in the thrilling paralysis of the overcrowded moment. Their eyes are locked uncertainly on each other. A bucket handle rattles and cold water explodes across the lawn, soaking the cat more than the laughing fox but both tear away into the shadows, into the alleys into their own separate parts of the night which turns out - in its despairing vastness - to have enough room for both of them.

And in their ears, behind them and around them, there is the angry speak of Noho people: "Udaję się daleko! Jest spokojny!"

Write it like you stole it: *Confessions of a local fanzine writer*

BY GARY INGHAM

All I wanted to do was have as much sex as possible and start a band. So I came to Northampton. Shockingly, it didn't really work out. It was the autumn of 1997 and all the world was green, well, greenish, quite literally my salad days. Snotty salad days. Northampton had half a dozen record shops, a couple of dozen decent local bands, an underground book store, Alan Moore, and the only blogspots anyone had came from sniffing glue. It'd do me, a shagbag outcast student with a chip shop on his shoulder who had read too much Jack Kerouac, I was prime fanzine writer material. Not that this idea flashed immediately overhead like a cartoon light bulb. I assumed I'd be offered an investigative press job with a bottomless bar tab at the offices of NME, the Monday after I graduated with only my University College Combined Honours certificate, a snarl and an assortment of Berol felt tips to back me up.

Checking the job section of The Guardian every Monday awaiting the open door into a new vanguard of gonzo journalism didn't pan out as expected. 'IPC Sub Editors Dictate Our Youth' by Clinic was a favourite tune at the time. Too right, I thought I. Seems these big shots expect you to have some previous form, a half-sturdy grasp of the English language, and preferably social skills of any standard human. The bare nerve of these goons was astonishing. I wanted in. There was no way in, but there was an obvious solution. So obvious, that about four years passed and it came to me: DO. IT. YOURSELF (with as much help as you can filch). The only fanzine in town on radar was found on the counter of Spiral Archive record shop titled 'Pants'. It was 50 pages of typed tripe and advertisements at the cost of £1. I could have a bash at this. I knew designers, I worked in a photography shop, and it was clear to me that I was the greatest undiscovered young rock poet ever, and that was way more than anyone should ever need to monopolise the world when I knew unshakably that a felt tip and a photocopier sufficed. There was a brief stab at something aimlessly titled 'Buffalo's Wings' which amounted to little more than a Pritt-Sticked collage of a pornographic griffin holding the severed head of Robbie Williams and a list of the records I wanted for Christmas. I thought it had potential.

Something finally came together when some total rubbish I wrote about some records I liked was propped up majestically by my unwitting wingman JT, the patient saint of Apple Macs. A title was needed. Me and JT had been in a crappy band together. We stopped playing this one song in our set as we found it usually received what we coined 'blank stares and cricket claps' from the crowd. I say crowd, I mean our girlfriends. OK, the bar staff, but it dawned on me that this was typically what you got in Northampton. These people smell mediocrity seeping from the stage like beige farts. The dozen-strong pint-clutchers form an arced line around its radiation, and give the slow handclap of a sleepy cricket pavilion full of ale and pie, vaguely acknowledging the returning batsman's galumphing yomp from the crease, despatched from a middlin' innings. Or like Daffy Duck trying

to trump Bugs Bunny onstage in that old cartoon, a blur of tapping feet and jazz hands, his cummerbund exploded, he collapses to his knees awaiting applause, but all you hear are the crickets chirping in a field outside. That's a Northampton crowd right there. A worthy foe. Honestly, bands travel specifically to the provinces for this treatment, they love it. So that was our title, "Blank Stares & Cricketclaps".

It wasn't up to much admittedly. Just drunken ramblings and oddball whimsy, but I'd guessed that was whole point of any fanzine enterprise. Back then, you could see three or four great shows a week at The Soundhaus on Great Russell Street and when not many people came to see them it bothered us. We also presumed that if we reviewed the occasional show we might get some free entry favours. But no, not a sniff. The promoter, Neale Tidd, would never let us in for free. (He may have knocked a quid off - once. By mistake.) With all that free publicity he was getting from our couple of hundred hand-made zines too, what a rotter.

So I looked up PR companies. One beautiful morning not long after that something happened to my doormat. Free records landed on it. Like golden eggs from the back of a knackered goose. What wondrous treasures are these? We scattered and chattered like confused Apeloids around the first spark of a flame. Actual records, some even listenable, sent to your door, free of charge. The stuff of dreams. They're not shy those PR people, it's their business to promote. They put their contact details on your favourite band's website, so please make a zine, or write a blog, and ask these companies for guest list places, a free copy of the new album, and as much other free stuff as they can carry to the post office while they're at it. Why not? Who knows?

We decided that ours would be a free zine, to be left in suitable haunts and picked up by haunted people who thought it suitable. But well, nothing is free is it, so how do you get by without costing yourself? Well, that renowned internet auction site came in very handy: we were making like bandits from these free-promo eggs. Assuming bandits can just about afford a cheap cigar and a £5 quaffable Cabernet. And if some dedicated follower of not-so-Modernism wants to spend £30 on an advance CD of Paul Weller's new album in a card sleeve, then who am I to deny him his peccadillo? What some people call a crime, I call righteous preservation. As is the procurement of advertising revenue from your local business benefactors. Prog overlord Robert John Godfrey of The Enid gave us a £100 cheque to help us out in exchange for some of his own editorial space. The cash paid for a Blank Stares compilation CD of local acts we liked, because that's the kind of thing fanzines do. (And though he was a lovely chap, an editorial wouldn't be possible I'm afraid, thanks). Alex Novak of Spiral Archive kept us in staples for all 9 issues that we juggled out. I'd say God bless him, but I'm not sure what it means, and I doubt he'd appreciate that. The Pad shop at the top of Abington Street (purveyors of all that was gimmicky, retro, pretty, and not altogether useful), sponsored us for one issue before they got wise. They shut down permanently soon afterwards. I'm sure my whispered hex had nothing to do with it.

notes from noho





The perks are obvious, - you get to interview people you'd thought possibly didn't really exist, you liked 'em so much. I urinated with nerves in a Citroen Baldet car park on the Wellingborough Road phoning a guy called Greg Dulli, whose lyrics I had written on my pencil case at school. That ended up ok, but then there was the time The Pipettes strutted into the bar for our chat in full stage-bouffant mini-skirt and heels attire and I quietly bolted via the fire escape in sheer sexual fear to phone their press agent and say the interview was off, as I'd been in a terrible car accident. Or the time I'd not gone to the Devendra Banhart interview because I'd seen him from a distance and didn't like his hat. I dare say I wasn't very well at the time, but then John Peel mentioned me on his show, sent me some e-mails and I was full of beans again.

Then I got offered a gig writing demo reviews for a council-funded free local music mag called Music For Squares. Now there was something. Not many towns get that sort of homespun funded fancy, and unfortunately, not many towns appreciate expensive showing off. It was full of heart and looked lovely, but got thrown in the canal in a sack of bricks after 7 issues, amidst complaints of being too glossy, too cliquey, with not enough coverage of my mate's Death Techno band, etc, etc. Granted, a lot of the writing failed to see the difference between press-release copy and any sort of stab at journalism, but as I think Dean Martin said, everything is always too much of something to someone.

I schmoozed into free bar launch parties without being on the list and met some real press people. I didn't like them. Big cheese editor Phil Alexander chastised me for not writing my contact details on the back of the fanzine I gave him, and Conor McNicholas handled it like a used condom. I didn't want a job any more. The idea of doing this sort of thing for a living had started to get old around about the time I got bored of being sent free records with review demands. You can't sell all you love for a dollar.

The big music magazines on newsagent shelves now are no better for the soul than the X-Factor on your TV, whereas a

good fanzine is like a mix-tape from a strange friend. We don't need another eight page article on John Lennon, all the stories have been told, we need new legends. Music journalism used to be taken seriously as actual literature, so I read. Mick Farren, Nick Kent, Lester Bangs, these were heavyweight writers who chose music as their muse and were considered as artists in their own right. From the days of International Times, Creem, & early Rolling Stone until near the time NME went glossy, whose side you were on was more easily defined. But then at some point, Topshop put MC5 T-shirts on sale and the insides fell out like offal. Nobody writes articles like Lester Bangs' riff on Astral Weeks any more, but who would want to? Even on a webzine where you had total control and unlimited word count, you'd read like somebody trying to copy Lester Bangs and almost certainly failing badly. And who would want to scroll through all that, three inches at a time staring at a glossy phone screen getting a sore thumb? Blogs are easy, and that's their beauty and downfall. Sure, they're free, and instantly updated, but that can easily lead to lengthy descriptions about what you had for tea. Print is solidified blood, sweat and tears, with possibly a scribbled green-ink screed railing against the poor quality of the beer cups in The Roadmender, just to flesh it out.

Still, if Web 2.0 is all we've got - use it, write it like you stole it, spin us a lyrical ramble, the more self-indulgent the better. Like the new-ish blog 'Champ' by Northampton's own Jack Parker, he cuts deep into the underground, from the local to the moon, and shovels up the juicy worms.

I wonder if I'll make a fanzine again. To ask yourself the question means the answer is probably 'No'. Something a bit creepy about drifting into the foggy waters of your thirties like a ghost ship still sweating over the Swann Norton blade and stapler, but that's just me, and probably a fault via conceit. I wish there were more local fanzines, more solid cultural artifacts in this time of webzines and mp3 files. Like a friend sagely put it recently, "I don't want an iPad scolding my lap on the toilet, I want something tangible to read while I'm having a nice poo."



HAPPY ANGRY CHRISTMAS AND A MERRY MILITANT NEW YEAR

BY NORMAN ADAMS

WOW!

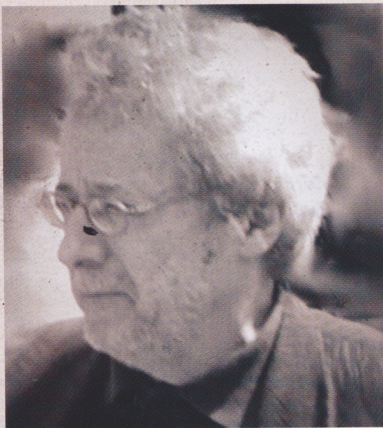
November 10th - students clash with police after entering Tory HQ at Millbank Tower, London.

Militant protest is the way to push back the attacks.

The anger against the assaults on workers, students and the poor crashed down on the government on Wednesday November 10th. It was the biggest demonstration

against the government since David Cameron went into Downing Street. It was brilliant to see so many students and lecturers take the initiative and give a focus for the hatred millions feel

about the cuts. The main point is that it showed the willingness to take the struggle to the government to resist rather than surrender.



Dr Ron Mendel, a lecturer at Northampton University, was in central London on the day and verbalised how pleased he was to see so many students taking part in the demonstration, considering that the full effects of the rise in tuition fees will NOT affect them but others

Closer to home in Northampton on the same day, around 80 tenants and residents confronted the council cabinet at the Guildhall over the controversial plans to regenerate two Northampton estates by private finance initiatives (PFI).

The local paper reported,

“The vice chairman of the Eastfield Residents Association, Tony Mallard said ‘Two communities will be destroyed by these plans. Families and friends will be split up because of it. If it was a village with a similar population, you’d say it was being ethnically cleansed’.”



During the tense meeting the leaders of the council were heckled and booed by the angry crowd.

The council has said a total of 195 homes may need be demolished, and the leader of the council said, “The compulsory purchase of houses has to be there as a final solution,” at which point members of the public heckled.

From a total of 18 people who addressed the meeting ONLY one spoke in favour.



The rest, mainly people from the affected estates, ALL made good points as to HOW this PFI would affect them.

Other speakers, like Dave Green of Northampton Save Our Public Services, clarified the more general facts about Northampton's experience of PFIs, like the ruinous scheme to finance our schools. We are now hundreds of millions of pounds in the red because of this catastrophic PFI policy that the Lib Dems failed to oppose when it was introduced.

Meanwhile, the same Lib Dems at the borough council look set to dig themselves deeper into a hole with their own PFI scheme for council housing that will see costs soar to many times over that of the real costs, and 'for sale' signs appearing over many open spaces and properties as a result.

Chris Swinn of Northampton Defend Council Housing outlined the findings of

the National Audit Office report concerning the performance of PFI housing projects which found: most projects have suffered significant cost increases and delays, and 21 of the 25 projects signed to date have experienced cost increases, 12 of which were over 100% increases. On the subject of timelines, delays range between five months, and five years and one month, the average being two years and six months. Norman Adams said, "The reason given for the areas in question doesn't stand up. The council says it's because of the number of homes not at the Decent Homes Standard." He went on to explain that this is a "red herring". The facts are that many other estates have far more homes failing on that measure, his own Delapreestate included. Estates have been singled out for the open spaces that can be built on, in some cases the gardens of homes and even homes knocked down to give access to green space.

He urged the residents to keep on building on the petition - this council hasn't got residents to buy in to this scheme, it's still not a done deal.

What comes next in the build up to our Angry Christmas and Militant New Year?

Following meetings with the Northampton Trade Union Council and Public Sector Unions, it has been agreed to hold a public meeting. At the time of writing this article I can confirm that the General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union and the Information Director of London Health Emergency, the country's biggest and longest-running pressure group in defence of the NHS, will be speaking at a public meeting to be held in December in Northampton.

Watch this space - or rather watch your local green space.



Northampton Country Council workers earlier this year

CAPTAIN OATES IS GOING TO THE SHOPS. HE MAY BE SOME LITTLE TIME.

Alan Moore checks out the Winter Wonderland that is Spring Boroughs to see how it's getting on since this time last government, and concludes that this shit is cold.

You know how it is. I don't do a lot of charity, but I do like to talk about it. Last year, working paw-in-hand with community support angels CASPAR we managed to get a Dodgem Logic hamper to all of the sheltered-housing tenants in Spring Boroughs, up in the top two percentile of the U.K.'s deprivation charts and already the bookie's favourite for a Christmas number one. Since then, of course, there have been changes, both in the afflicted neighbourhood and in the nation as a whole: we now have a prime minister with two heads, and despite all of its mostly single-handed efforts to regenerate the district CASPAR's funding has run out. So, CASPAR's no longer around, while all the problems that it helped alleviate are still there and unlikely to get anything but worse under our current peasant-trampling administration, who probably use dead paupers as draft-excluders, yeah?

This year, working with the admirably ethical and community-minded Co-op branch in Barry Road, we're planning to get hampers...well, we call them hampers, but they're actually reusable cloth shopping bags...to all elderly residents, and similarly to the shelter run by the Salvation Army on the Mayorhold. Let's be clear about this – these aren't Harrods hampers. If you got them as a present from a relative you might well feel slightly insulted. They're the best that we could do, and they're a lot better than nothing, but we doubt they'll make a measurable impression on the area's overall wellbeing. There are difficulties that a half-baked magazine which features penises in space-suits is unable to address, and they stand out most clearly with a backdrop of frost, ice and slush.

We talked to Gladys Farmer, 85, whose main concern is the conspicuous lack of grit upon the walks and stairways leading from her flat, along with the uneven paths that can't be spotted under even a thin layer of snow. Relying on her family rather than local services (her family are more dependable because they actually exist), Gladys stayed in throughout the festive season last year rather than risk injury over a luxury like going out. Rating her situation on a scale of 'quite good' to 'quite bad', she speaks with a great deal of prior experience when she informs us that "It's awful".

Then we spoke to Iris Vigo, a well-known family name around the neighbourhood even in my day, aged 72, disabled with a mobility scooter and conveniently situated on the top floor of St. Barnabas House, with seventy steps between her and the ground if lifts aren't working. Iris says that in the icy weather the unsheltered landings which connect the flats are pretty much "like an ice-skating rink" that can only be navigated gingerly, clutching the hand rail for dear life. Although Iris is in what the Northampton Borough Council have described as 'sheltered housing', she's still having problems claiming the reduction in utility bills that such tenants are supposed to have a right to, and, like Gladys, points out that the landings are not gritted, leaving residents to take care of the task themselves...though even then they face a disproportionately large array of obstacles.

When Kevin Donovan, who's also in St. Barnabas House and who claims that paths and walkthrough areas are dangerous for any resident regardless of their age, made an attempt last year to grit the third floor landing he was hindered by the fact he had no shovel and that the grit bins were empty. Tony Shelswell, also of St. Barnabas, says that he'd be prepared to salt or grit the treacherous landings if the grit bins were kept full or if salt bins could be provided, local shops having run out of this commodity last year. While Jay Patel of Nicky's News often arranges free drop-offs of shopping for elderly residents, she says that they should get more help in dealing with such hazards as the icy open stairwell in St. Katherine's House or snowbound slopes that lead to many of the flats, rather than having to rely upon community support where they can get it. Which is a good point.

You'll note that amongst people trying to help out, whether that's Kevin, Tony, Jay, Gladys's family or even this dishevelled magazine, there's not a furrow-browed wealthy philanthropist in sight. In times like these you'll generally find The Big Society has other things to do and we all end up having to rely as always on Little Society, on the connections between ordinary human beings with an ounce of fucking feeling in their hearts rather than just spent toxic fuel-rods. Get involved with your community, and if that's doing nicely by itself then get involved with a community that isn't. If some furrow-browed wealthy philanthropists turn up to help that would be well fantastic, but let's make that plan B, shall we? And remember, a social conscience isn't just for Christmas, so don't just abandon it beside a busy motorway in January and hope it doesn't suffer. Keep warm, and I'll see you soon.



Alex Musson.

Web designer by day, comedy mag writer by night. Mustard is photocopied in front of a live studio audience. www.mustardweb.org/alex



Andrew Waugh.

Illustrator on Mustard Pages likes to write things and draw funny pictures some of these can be seen at thismeanswaugh.blogspot.com



Barney Farmer/Lee Healey.

Writer barneyfarmer@hotmail.com and cartoonist Lee Healey leehealey@btinternet.com have worked together forever, in that time contributing to publications including Viz, Maxim and the one in your hands.



Claire Ashby.

I do gardening, artwork, chewing gum and kick ass. Hate politicians and red tape. I like being outside.

E URBAN GUERRILLA

Calluz.

Loves Gfunk



Dave Hamilton.

Co-author of the Self sufficientish Bible and selfsufficientish.com. He also works as freelance writer and runs wild food/foraging courses.



David Quantick.

First worked with savage pencil at the NME. Since then he has written television comedy [Brass Eye, TV Burps], radio shows [One, The Beggars Guide] and, most importantly, is the voice of Channel Four's Coach Trip.



Dick Foreman

is known by many as a torpid viper, and lectures regularly at the charm school for snakes. When he's not laying around shitfaced, that is...



Ellie Mains

Ellie Mains was roped into illustrate for Dave Hamilton's articles. Although this is her first ever commission, she has rather enjoyed it and would be willing to do it again.

Contact Eleanor.mains@gmail.com



Gary Ingham.

Writer of Blank Stares and Cricket claps fanzine, and chief hassle stirrer of Broken Shackle Tabernacle live music promotions of Northampton. Gary was awarded a certificate for completing the 25 meters front crawl in 1986. www.myspace.com/brokenshackle



HOAX.

Creative team behind Dodgem Logic. www.thisishoax.com



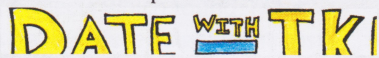
Joe Brown.

Designer, Photographer, Musician, and now apparently Writer. Is there nothing he won't take a vague flailing stab at? joestupidstupid@hotmail.co.uk



Josie Long

Has been sent from the future to track down Sarah Connor. She lives in London, which is called "642 swamp" in the future



Jonny 'Dope' Delafonz

has been playing drums in Alabama 3 for (as far as he can remember) forever. He has now turned his hand to illustration, while he waits for the band to become an international stadium-acid-country-blues-phenomenon.



Kevin O'Neill.

Stone Age comic book artist, who refuses to be dragged beyond the 19th century. Kevin has ink in his veins and dyslexia explains him having the world's largest collection of corn.



Kristian Hammerstad

lives and works in Oslo, Norway. After working for years in animation he now tries to draw one image at a time. He is married and loves cats.



Kurt Amacker

began working for New Orleans Homeland Security in 2006. He and his wife, Sabrina, refused to move after Katrina. He also writes comic books and articles like this one. You can learn more at www.facebook.com/kurtamackercomics.



Lejorne Pindling

Writer, Presenter and Music Producer for "ill"arekordz who can be found at www.illarekordz.webs.com, providing more beats, than I used to get from my Mum :)



Melinda Gebbie.

Former underground cartoonist, professional pornographer, author, sculptress, lecturer and illustrator of Lost Girls [Written by Alan Moore]. Melinda now resides in Northampton for her sins.



Margaret Killjoy.

is an itinerant and adventurer who contributes regularly to Steam Punk magazine and Strangers In a Tangled Wilderness. They have a blog: www.birdsbeforethestorm.net



Martin Marprelate

knows when you are sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been bad or good, so he's very like Andy Coulson in that respect, allegedly.



Norman Adams. is a tenants' rights campaigner who has a workshop at the North Pole and reads all the letters that people send him. Coming soon, down a chimney near you.



Oi'Bill

All the jobs Bill Martin had since leaving the Oi' Bill ended with a promise to 'meet for lunch sometime...' OK, so he failed, but at least he tried! Yesss!!!



Orlando Harrison

(A.K.A The Spirit) Is a thin writer and musician from London. He plays keyboards with Hooligan Night, Electronic anti-improvisation group Amal Gamal Ensemble, and the Alabama 3, about whom he writes a scandalous blog: www.alabama3.co.uk/en/containers/general/the_spirit_speaks. One day he hopes to destroy Jupiter.



Robin Ince.

My fingers are made of 1000 penguin paperback papercuts.



Simon Cooper.

Illustrator, GSOH, 21ish, honest, reliable, sort, hairy, likes drawing and colouring in. www.cooperillo.com



Savage Pencil.

www.savagepencil.com
Email savx@savlab.demon.co.uk



Steve Aylett.

Steve Aylett has written books such as LINT, Slaughtermatic and The Inflatable Volunteer, as well as comics like The Caterer and Get That Thing Away From Me.



Steve Holland

Coffee-fuelled freelance writer and editor. His The Trials of Hank Janson was a runner-up for the CWA's Silver Dagger for non-fiction. Writes about obscure British authors and comics at bearalley.blogspot.com



Stewart Lee

is a writer and comedian. His book How I Escaped My Certain Fate, and a new DVD If You Prefer A Milder Comedian Please Ask For One, are both available currently. A second series of Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle starts on BBC2 in Spring 2011. www.stewartlee.co.uk



Tamsyn Payne.

50% CRAFTS, 40% CAKE, 10% MISCELLANEOUS...all woman-ish



Wendi Jarrett.

Wendi's food for health activities supports a range of local communities and their 'getting to grips with food'. She encourages sharing, teaching and learning. Contact her on 07749873187 or email wendi4news@hotmail.co.uk.



Local Services

The Lowdown Northampton
01604 634385

Welfare Rights Northampton
01604 636112
Citizens advice Northampton
0870 120 2433

CAN Northampton
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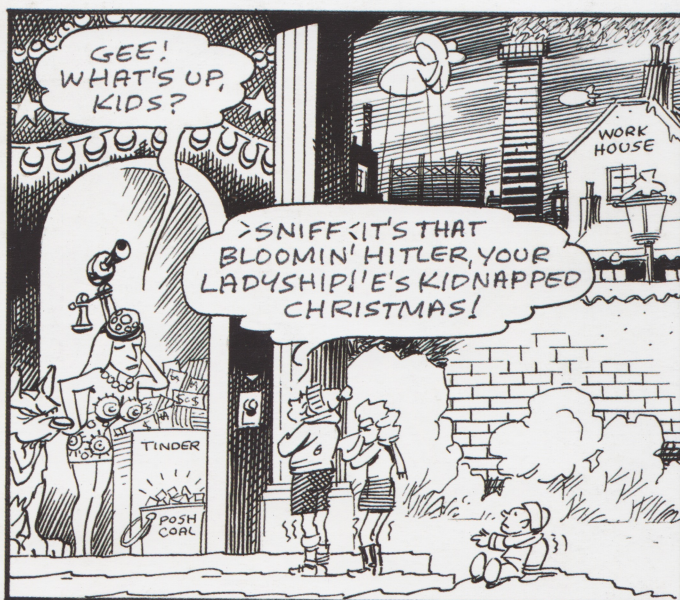


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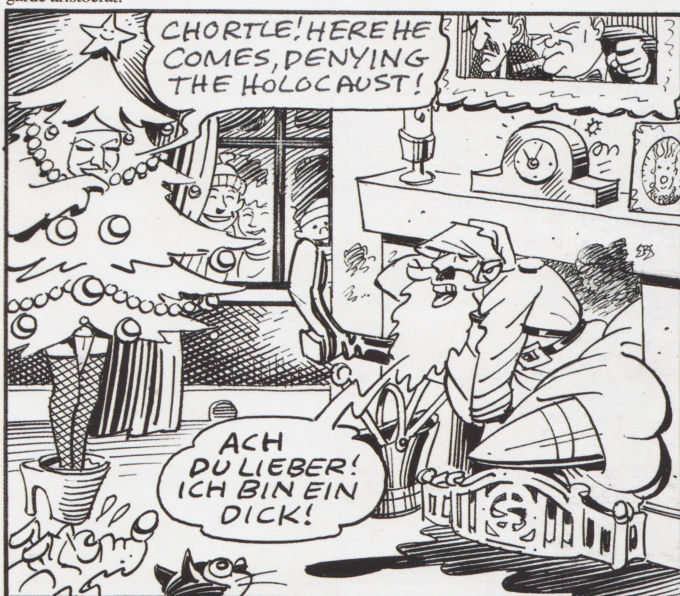
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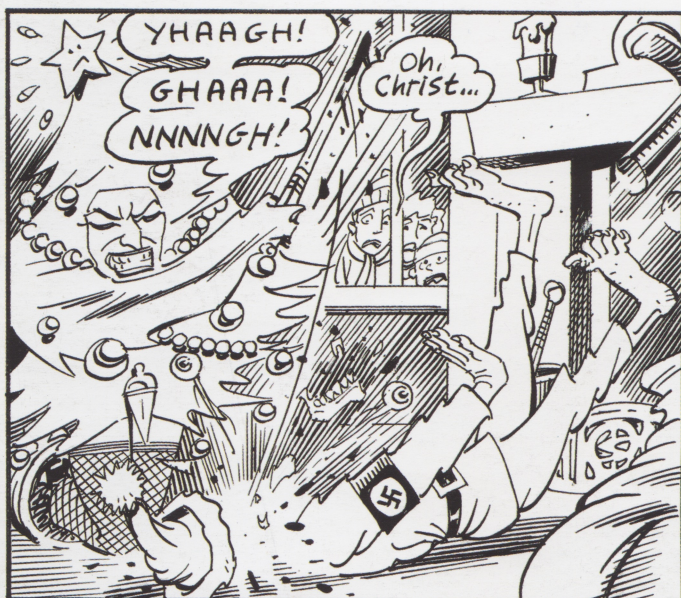
Greetings, chums! It's Christmas Eve at Gaga Hall, with Lord and Lady Gaga busy decorating their Venus Flytrap when crack-orphans arrive with news that Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler has kidnapped Christmas! "Let me just change into a leotard made of weasels", chirps the avant-garde aristocrat.



Our pals soon spot the one-testicled tyrant delivering a doodlebug to her ladyship's neighbour, Lady Marmalade. "This calls for action...and a Lego mini-skirt!" quips our dissociative dowager.



Eventually settling for dungarees carved out of a fir-tree and a single dirt-filled flowerpot shoe, Gaga hides in the Marmalade family's front parlour while Adolf emerges from the fireplace! What's her madcap plan?



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Quicker than Swedish electricity, our added Arch-Duchess seizes an implement from the hearthside companion, pummelling the Fuehrer's countenance into a bloody pulp. "Now that's what I call a poker-face", she trills through the spatter.

Wearing live tarantulas, the mental Marquise invites the ragamuffins to a slap-up meal of bangers and mash...or should we say dildos in a big pile of cocaine? Happy Christmas, everyone! Happy Christmas!